

TRIPOLI



TRIPOLI

A NARRATIVE OF THE PRINCIPAL
ENGAGEMENTS OF THE
ITALIAN-TURKISH WAR

DURING THE PERIOD
23 OCTOBER, 1911, TO 15 JUNE, 1912

BY

L.T.-COL. G. RAMACIOTTI

Commanding 1st Battalion 2nd Australian Infantry Regiment

Author of "The Solution of Tactical Problems," "Scouting," "Hints on Company Training."

LONDON
HUGH REES, LTD.
5 REGENT STREET, PALL MALL, S.W.

1912

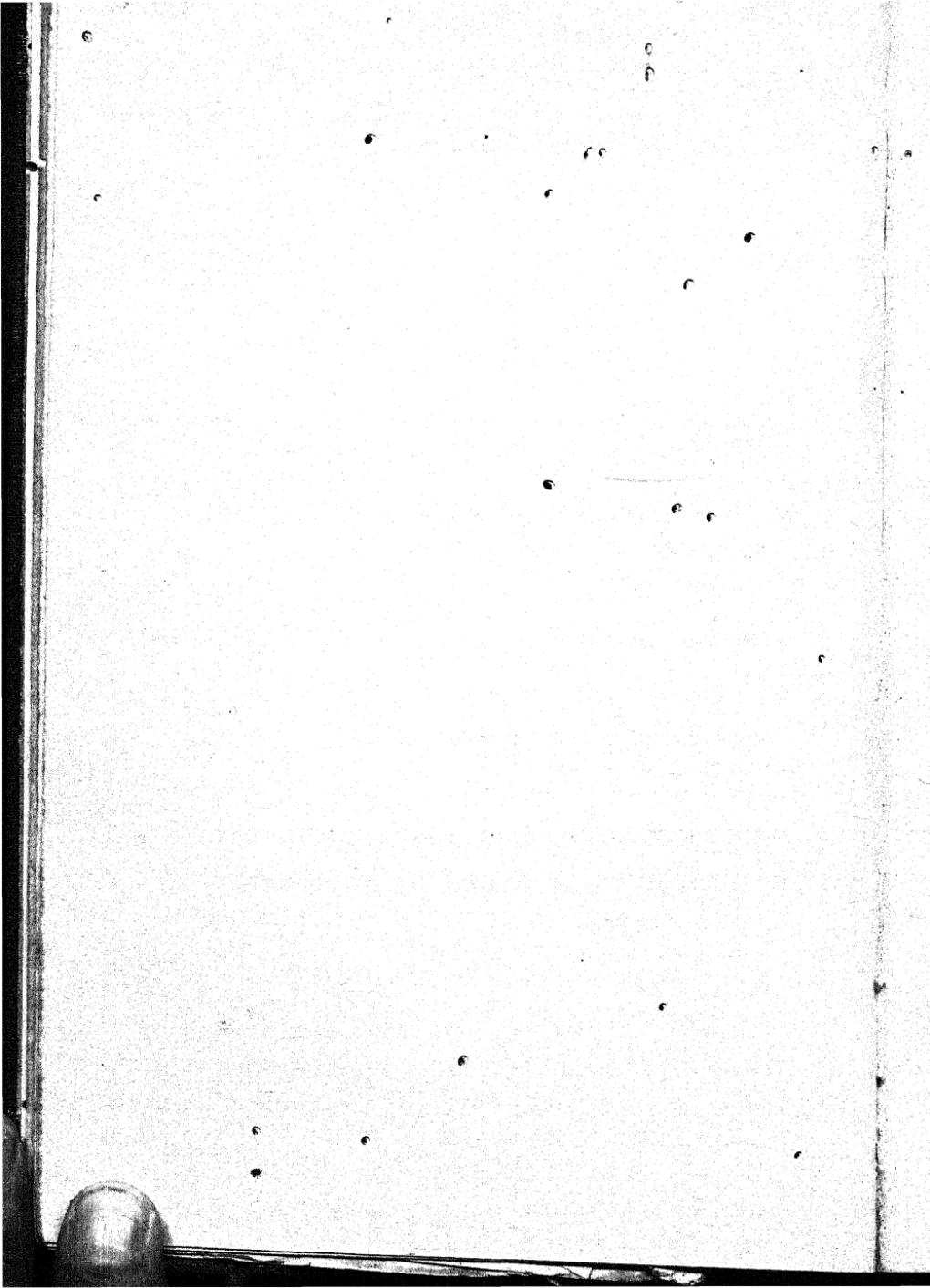
[All rights reserved]

3,479.

PRINTED BY
HAZELL, WATSON AND VINEY, LTD.,
LONDON AND AYLESBURY.

CONTENTS

	Page
FOREWORD	vii
I. SCIARA SCIAT	1
II. SIDI MESRI	4
III. HENNI	9
IV. AIN ZARA	19
V. BIR TOBRAS	28
VI. GARGARESCH	41
VII. GARGARESCH AND AIN ZARA	47
VIII. HOMS	52
IX. DERNA	71
X. BENGASI	93
XI. BU KAMESCH	106
XII. ZANZUR	113



FOREWORD

The history of Italian operations in Libya may be divided into two distinct phases. To the first belong the bombardment of Tripoli and the evacuation of it by its Turkish garrison, followed by the landing of 1,700 Italian sailors on October 5, 1911.

The German Consul having asked for protection against the bands of robbers who had taken advantage of the withdrawal of the Turkish soldiers to descend upon the city, the latter was occupied by the Italians, who were already in possession of the forts, and who took immediate steps to prevent its sack.

The city was held by the sailors under Captain Cagni against repeated attacks from all sides through a harassed period of six days and nights during which they practically knew no rest.

The second phase of the war was entered upon on the 11th with the landing of the first soldiers of the army of occupation. The first detachment set foot on shore in the afternoon, and before sundown the sailors in the trenches had been relieved by the soldiers. On the 12th the main body of the expedition had landed.

The Turco-Arabic conspiracy resulting in the attack of the 23rd was made possible by the Italians leaving the Turkish regulars who, some 1,800 to 2,000 strong,

had evacuated Tripoli, undisturbed in its neighbourhood.

During the first few days following the landing, they were quite close to Tripoli, dispirited and disorganised. Cagni could have crushed them had he had more sailors at his disposal, and probably it was not too late to do so when the first troops landed. There seems to have been no great difficulty in the way. The war could in all likelihood have been finished then, but local circumstances appear to have been disregarded and the Army of Occupation found it advisable, on landing, to sit down to prepare deliberately for a long campaign. A broken enemy, to destroy whom was of the first importance, was thus given time to resume its interrupted relations with the Arabs of Tripoli, and not only to call to their colours the Arabs and Bedouins of the surrounding country, but to obtain money, arms, ammunition, and, most important of all, leaders from abroad.

The elimination of the Turks from the neighbourhood of Tripoli seemed urgent enough to have warranted some risks, as it meant undoubtedly the end of the war. The moral effect would have been incalculable ; but, unfortunately, either its importance was overlooked or unknown causes precluded it, and what should have been the end of the second phase of the occupation proved merely the commencement of it.

TRIPOLI

I

SCIARA SCIAT

The Italian outpost line extended nine miles from Fort A on the seashore west of Tripoli, south-east through the oasis gardens to Bu Meliana and east to Mesri and Fort Mesri, thence north through the oasis of Henni and Sciara Sciat, to the seashore.

At 8 a.m. on October 23, 1911, favoured by almost impenetrable ground affording them excellent cover, the Turco-Arabs crept up to and delivered a resolute attack in force against the east front of the Italian outpost line under cover of a demonstration against the south-west front. The force making the demonstration was composed of Arab horsemen and Turkish infantry, and was repulsed.

At 9.30 a.m. the attack in force on the east had likewise been repulsed. At this juncture the Italians were attacked from behind by the Arabs of that part of the oasis within the Italian lines, which became suddenly alive with them. These Arabs had been permitted by the Italians to return to their houses within the oasis traversed by the outpost line from which they had been cleared out at the time of the landing of the Army of Occupation. The fire of these Arabs was

TRIPOLI

directed, not only against the Italians then driving back the Turkish attacks, but against the various army services within the Italian lines, including the hospitals. Its principal object was to cut off possible reinforcements from Tripoli.

The battalions on the south-west of the outpost line from Fort A to Little Fort Mesri being less strongly engaged, detached small mobile columns of various strength who directed their efforts to the suppression of the insurrection within the oasis, undergoing in its accomplishment a relatively light loss.

The three battalions of the 11th Bersaglieri facing east were less fortunate.

Warmly engaged all along their front, they suddenly found an enemy at their back. They had the 27th Battalion on the left towards Sciara Sciat, the 15th in the centre towards Henni, the Officer Commanding and Staff and the 33rd Battalion on the right towards Little Fort Mesri. The 33rd was attacked first and was reinforced by one company from Henni, and a second company had to be sent from the same locality to protect two field ambulances attacked by the Arabs in the neighbourhood of Feschlum, a short distance west of Henni within the Italian outpost line.

The Turks were quick to take advantage of the weakening of the centre where only one company of the 15th remained and a company of the 27th was moved to reinforce the threatened point. Simultaneously the action developed strongly against the left of the Italians, where the 4th and 5th companies, all that remained there of the 27th Battalion, were completely surrounded by the enemy, who, repulsed on the south, where a demonstration had initiated the day's

operations, with great mobility had concentrated at Sciara Sciat and taken that part of the position virtually between two fires. The two companies in question suffered heavily, being almost wiped out.

Not thinking it prudent to deprive of men the south and south-west fronts of the position, against which a renewal of the attack of the morning seemed probable, the Officer Commanding Division, General Pecori-Giraldi, sent in support of the 4th and 5th companies of the 27th Battalion a battalion of the 82nd Infantry from the suburbs of Tripoli and some Fortress Artillery. Of the battalion of the 82nd, only one company out of four were able to get to Henni, being engaged in dealing piecemeal with the rebels of the oasis practically the whole way. Of what was left of the 4th and 5th companies of the 11th Bersaglieri a small portion was picked up by this battalion, a few men got to Henni, while the balance, 145, gave up their arms to the enemy, who surrounded them, and, after marching them off, shot them in cold blood. One of the leaders of the Arabs, Said Tintam, was tried and hung in Tripoli for it some months after.

Near Fort Mesri forty-four men of the 9th company surrounded on all sides entrenched and fought from nine till twelve. Reduced to sixteen, they were then reinforced by another squad, and held their own till five, when they were relieved.

The fight lasted over eight hours, and only ceased when the rebel Arabs had been driven step by step out of their hiding-places within the oasis, and the Italians, freed from attacks on their rear, were able to turn their whole attention to the enemy in front and drive it beyond the outpost lines which they reoccupied at the end of the day.

II

SIDI MESRI

At daylight on October 26, 1911, the Turks opened fire against the Italian position.

On the previous day and night Turks and Arabs had had every opportunity of assembling under cover and unseen in the close and difficult country forming the oasis through which the Italian outpost line ran in part, notwithstanding that this country had been shelled by the Italians.

The Italian pickets gave a quick alarm and the outpost line at once came into action. The Turkish Cavalry initiating the attack were driven back but returned shortly afterwards supported by regular Turkish Infantry and Arab Irregulars. Vigorous attacks developed simultaneously against the centre of the Italian position towards Mesri and on the left flank towards Henni, with the evident object of turning the latter. The attackers, with absolute recklessness and notwithstanding heavy losses, advanced right up to the Italian trenches, but were unable to penetrate the defence. The right was not at any time decisively attacked, the operations against it appearing to be nothing more than a holding attack.

As soon as the light permitted, Italian aeroplanes went up in reconnaissance. With very little delay they ascertained and signalled the enemy's dispositions

and their strength, enabling the Italian Field Artillery as well as the old ironclad *Sicilia*, moored off Sciara Sciat, to come into action, with very good results, especially against the Turkish Artillery.

In the neighbourhood of the house of Giamil Bey, east of the Cavalry Barracks, the enemy actually got within the Italian lines, after decimating a company of the 84th, which lost all its officers. The situation at this stage was for a while very critical for the Italians, as from the oasis at their back a number of Arabs, survivors of the twenty-three and still at large, had begun firing into them.

The close and difficult nature of the ground before the house itself acting as a natural fortification rendered its possession valuable in the extreme. The house was held by the 7th company of the 84th Infantry, and became the objective of the main attack. The Arabs got through the 84th, and attacked the house in flank and rear while the Italians were dealing with a renewed and stronger attack against the front of their trenches. Notwithstanding a desperate defence the Arabs took the house, and by sheer weight of numbers completely broke the outpost line at this point, crowding into the oasis—within and beyond it. But at this stage they failed in concerted action, and instead of an organised attack they dispersed and lost time in separate attacks against houses in which the Italians driven out of their positions had taken refuge, giving time for reinforcements to come up and turn the tide of battle. And the house itself was re-taken by the Italians at considerable loss to both sides.

The officer commanding the 84th Infantry had mean-

time sent towards Giamil Bey's house two squads of the 12th company, a section of quickfirers and two squadrons of Lodi Cavalry on foot.

The attack had by this time become general. The Turks had, at the beginning of the action, advanced a line of skirmishers extended at from two to six paces interval, reinforced regularly and well by reserves divided into two bodies, the strongest about $2\frac{1}{2}$ kilometres in rear of the firing line. This line grew gradually thicker as the advance progressed, until, at the time when the reserves had been practically absorbed, there was no longer a line at intervals in steady advance, but a mass in a confused formation who had overcrowded and lost all semblance of discipline, offering an excellent target to the quickfiring sections attached to the infantry of the defence, whose guns, well worked, proved of undoubted assistance at the critical time when the Turco-Arabs, with great bravery, made an unsuccessful attempt to carry the centre of the position by sheer weight of numbers.

A strong force of Arabs had meantime kept the Italian troops between Sciara Sciat and Henni busy, but their attempt to turn the left flank of the position towards Henni failed and the attacking force had retired shelled by four howitzer batteries in position at the tombs of the Karamanli.

On the remainder of their front the strong fire of the infantry of the defence assisted by the naval guns had succeeded in driving back the enemy, who in some places had actually got within thirty yards of them.

At 6.15 a.m. the situation, good everywhere else, was getting worse for the Italians near the house of

Giamil Bey, where the reinforced 7th company was under heavy fire. A company of engineers acting as infantry had been added to the defence at this point, but the numbers would have been insufficient to hold back the Turco-Arabs had not a battalion of 82nd Infantry arrived upon the scene from the Cavalry Barracks. Two companies immediately reinforced the troops engaged, while the remaining two succeeded by making a long detour in reoccupying the trenches, strengthening them and driving the Arabs from the neighbourhood.

When the attack on the centre was driven back the right flank of the outpost advanced out of the trenches and counter-attacked the enemy's left. After a hand-to-hand fight the 8th company of the 84th routed a strong group of Arabs massed round the green banner of the Prophet which they had previously carried right into the Italian position and captured it. This was followed by a pursuit by three squadrons of Lodi Cavalry supported by three squads of the last company of the 82nd. The Arabs were chased through the oasis and either killed or captured.

At 8 a.m. the Turco-Arabs, weakened by the Italian fire, had realised the hopelessness of the situation, and began to retire.

The attack was very determined and developed with conspicuous bravery, though at close range the want of discipline and organisation undoubtedly told.

The defence was admirably conducted, handicapped as it was by the force being admittedly inadequate to the extent of the position and the position itself mostly in difficult country. The 40th Infantry Regiment waited until the Turks were within a few yards of their

lines before commencing volley firing. No force could stand before such well-directed and well-regulated fire. When the Turks wavered and broke, four companies of the 4th and 40th Regiments came out of their trenches and with great dash delivered a counter attack with the bayonet, taking the enemy in flank and causing him heavy losses.

Desultory fighting in isolated groups continued throughout the day. Arabs hidden within the Italian lines had to be gradually dislodged either from houses or from behind natural defences, a work which tried the pluck of the Italians to a considerable extent.

The Italian field artillery gave the infantry valuable assistance with their shrapnel fire, demolishing houses either in the way or from which the enemy was firing on the Italians. The employment of artillery was exceptional in view of the short range and the close nature of the fight. The shielded Krupp guns fired once at 200 yards range, using shrapnel and doing the work of quickfirers.

The Italian losses for the 23rd and 26th were officially given at 13 officers and 361 of other ranks dead, 16 officers and 142 of other ranks wounded.

The attacking force was roughly estimated at 12,000. No reliable information of the Turkish losses is available.

III

HENNI

After the attacks of the 23rd and 26th October the Italian commander, recognising that his outpost line was too extensive for the number of troops at his disposal, consisting at the time of four infantry regiments of the 1st Division and the 11th Bersaglieri, drew back his eastern front one kilometre so as to considerably diminish the extent of the position to be defended.

The new line turned north from Mesri, which is on the limit of the desert, through Hamura and Feschlum to the tombs of the Karamanli, leaving out roughly four square kilometres of country, including Fort Hamidie, Sciara Sciat, Henni and Fort Mesri, which localities had, on October 23 and 26, been within the Italian lines.

On November 6 the 5th Brigade attacked and again took possession of Fort Hamidie, to which the restricted outpost line was extended, such extension running from the Tombs at a right angle east to the Fort and being parallel to the coast.

The Turco-Arab forces were concentrating at Henni and Am Russ, east of and in a line with Sciara Sciat.

The Castle of Henni is situated in the oasis east of Tripoli and south of the village of Sciara Sciat, and is

about midway between it and Fort Mesri, the three almost forming a line running north and south.

On November 26, 1911, the Italians, having in the meantime been reinforced by the arrival of troops from Italy, took the necessary steps to regain possession of their original position. The movement was successfully carried out, with precision and regularity, to exact time, over most difficult ground, where, owing to the restricted area available, the danger of overlapping was great.

Seven regiments and ten batteries moved off, fought and occupied the line assigned to them, in harmony and without loss of touch—a triumph of organisation and discipline—each unit keeping to its allotted zone and to its time-table, developing the action exactly as intended.

The force employed consisted of the 93rd Infantry (4 battalions), with 1 battery Mountain Artillery, 2 battalions of Grenadiers, each with 1 section Mountain Guns, 11th Regiment Bersaglieri (3 battalions) each with 1 section Mountain Guns and of 1 company 18th Infantry and of the 84th Regiment. To these troops, forming the 3rd Division under General Charaud, was entrusted the main attack against the Turkish position.

The 6th Brigade, formed by the 50th, 52nd, and 23rd Infantry Regiments, all young troops of an average age of twenty-three, under General Nasali-Rocca, was directed to advance from the south face of the Italian position over the margin of the oasis between Mesri and Fort Mesri. Their objective was the enemy's left flank, upon which they were to converge. This enveloping movement was to precede the advance of

the 3rd Division, and the success of the operation depended upon that Division being able to attack in front—at the exact moment—the Turco-Arabs, already shaken by the flank attack.

During the night (25th-26th) the outworks of the outpost line were opened at certain points by the removal of entanglements and the pulling down of barricades to enable the troops to go out at dawn. This work was carried out very quietly.

The 6th Brigade concentrated at the house of Nesciat Bey, between Mesri and the Cavalry Barracks to the west of it.

At 6 a.m. two squadrons of Lodi Cavalry went out on reconnaissance, followed by the 50th Regiment, who had the longest way to go, its duty being to protect the flank of the 6th Brigade against a possible attack from the direction of Ain Zara, where the Turks had their base south of Mesri ; then the 23rd, and, last, the 52nd.

These battalions, once outside the outpost lines, got quickly into position in absolute silence. The naval guns of the *Carlo Alberto* opened fire in support of and to cover the advance, shelling the oasis in front of the Turkish position. The last battalion was hardly on its way when the first Turkish shrapnel, fired from a battery at Fort Mesri, burst over it. The infantry, still in column formation, was thereupon ordered to deploy, the movement being carried out well and without sensible hindrance to the advance. Open spaces were thereafter crossed at the double, formations being rapidly corrected under cover at every halt. Some crowding, noticeable under cover, dissipated as soon as the advance was resumed.

The Turkish fire was for a time well sustained, but did not delay the Italian advance.

The scouts of the firing line, of the three Italian units in extended order formed an uninterrupted chain, the advance on coming to closer range being made by rushes, the men at every halt lying down and rapidly entrenching.

The Italian batteries at Bu Meliana and Mesri, as well as the Mountain Batteries, were in action by this time. The Mountain Batteries of the 3rd Division were so well placed that the Turks failed to locate them. Their shrapnels were falling thickly on the Turkish Artillery and also beating the ground in front of the advance. The Turkish Artillery, silenced for a brief space, afterwards kept up a desultory fire on the advancing Italian Infantry, but casualties had shaken their nerve and, having lost the ranges, their fire was high and beyond the target, though some Italians in the third line of the advancing brigade were wounded, including a doctor attending a wounded man.

The two squadrons of cavalry protecting the right flank of the advancing infantry disappeared at this juncture and the Italian Artillery thinking the cavalry about to charge the Turkish guns, suspended its fire. The Turks quickly profited by this to resume their artillery fire at the advancing infantry, but again without stopping it. The cavalry having once more appeared on the right flank of the advance, the Italian Artillery came into action and once more silenced the Turkish battery.

At 8.30 a.m. the left flank of the 6th Brigade was level with Mesri. Its scouts, wading through the "Menegin" River, passed quickly the last Italian

redoubt, advanced beyond it, explored the ruins of the hospice near by and gave the signal to resume the advance. The leading companies advancing by rushes were suddenly met by a hot rifle fire of Regular Turkish Troops, who were firing steadily by word of command from a line of trenches alongside Fort Mesri, which crowns a small bare hill. The whole of this zone dominates the oasis, and is high and bare of vegetation. It was traversed by Turkish trenches running north towards Henni with the parapets of the southern portion right under the Fort. The Italian Infantry, unable at first to locate the enemy, were forced to take cover while their artillery silenced the Turkish rifle fire. The Turks, however, did not leave their trenches or, if they did, they returned to them as soon as the Italian guns ceased fire, to permit their infantry to resume its advance. The steady fire of the Turks was then once more renewed, but the advance continued notwithstanding. The companies of the advance-guard of the 6th Brigade well deployed in extended order, regularly and steadily halted to fire, the Italian firing-line by this time forming an uninterrupted chain right across the oasis and the main Turkish position.

At this point towards the desert in the direction of Ain Zara and parallel to the south front of the Italian position were located trenches, roughly one kilometre in extent, protecting the oasis of Ain Zara which formed the Turkish base of operations and at the same time threatening the right flank of the Italian attack. Automatically and in perfect order the 50th Regiment changed front, attacked the two Turkish battalions behind these trenches and routed them. On the

other side the 50th attacked the right of the main Turkish position, which they captured after half an hour's sharp fighting.

At 9.20 the 11th Bersaglieri under Colonel Fara led the advance of the 3rd Division towards the front of the Turkish position with the Grenadiers and 93rd Infantry on the left, the 18th next towards the centre, and the Alpine Battalion on the right of the line.

This force marched out of the eastern trenches by the different outlets which had been got ready for it, and deployed. The movement coinciding with the initiation of the attack of the 6th Brigade on the Turkish force at Fort Mesri, was well carried out, at the proper time. The way lay through the difficult ground of the oasis between the Italian and Turkish positions, traversed by hedges of cactus, dwarf walls, ditches, interspersed with houses thick with vegetation, and everywhere defended by a solid mass of Turks, Arabs and Bedouins.

Notwithstanding the difficulties, touch was well maintained, though every fold of the ground had to be systematically searched for the enemy. Cover was fully taken advantage of, line after line in a series of human chains with reserves, mountain batteries and ammunition columns following. At times only a few men were visible one to the other, and yet the line was maintained almost as if its components were holding hands.

Communications were well kept up, orders and information being given and passed in writing. A company of Grenadiers coming into action, the whole line halted till its opponents were dispersed. From 10 a.m. till 2 p.m. the advance fought its way steadily forward.

Very little resistance was offered by the Arabs occupying the oasis, who apparently could not understand the deliberately sustained advance, so different to the Italian reconnaissances to which they had become used. In retiring they fired from behind trees and walls, some of them actually climbing the palm trees through which the Italians were marching.

Houses had to be cleared of the enemy and taken one by one.

An infantry company got through the roof of a barricaded house defended by Arabs and drove them out. A squad of engineers under a hot fire mined and blew up a house in the way of operations. A battalion of the 23rd Regiment, cut off by a torrent, waded through it, waist deep, under fire. Contact being lost at one stage of the advance between the 11th Bersaglieri and the 23rd Infantry, a battalion was formed in haste from the reserve and sent to re-establish touch.

The Italians had information that on all houses used by the Turks as ammunition depots to facilitate mobility, a triangle had been traced on the walls. A squad of Bersaglieri saw this sign upon a house, and on searching it found a quantity of ammunition hidden in barrels under seeds. From the adjoining houses fire was opened on them, at close range. Afraid to reply, for fear of hitting their own men, the squad threw themselves upon the ground. The Arabs, thinking the volley had done execution, came out, to be met by point-blank fire.

The 93rd, on the left of the advance, met the strongest opposition and was compelled to shell house after house with its mountain artillery.

Many of the Arabs killed, as well as many of those killed by artillery fire earlier in the day, were found dressed in the clothes of the Bersaglieri, killed a month earlier.

The resistance to the advance of the Division through the oasis, though considerable, was never in an organised form. The Turks and Arabs, in some cases, did not even profit by the trenches they had excavated, nor by the natural defences of the ground. Fort Mesri and its trenches made only a show of resistance, being wiped out by the Italian artillery who prepared the way for the infantry.

The enemy opposing the advance of the Italians at Henni were driven from the first line of their trenches by shrapnel fire. They changed front in favourable ground, the worth of which they thoroughly knew, and the 11th Bersaglieri found itself against them on the extreme right of the oasis. Between the Italian outpost line left behind and the enemy's positions a line had been fixed by the Italian commander, where the attacking force had orders to halt under cover to correct intervals, resume contact and re-form where necessary, prior to the last phase of the attack.

At 11 a.m. the Bersaglieri reached the line in question in full contact with the rest of the advance, which, on account of the difficult ground and the various isolated fights had nevertheless remained somewhat behind. Little by little the whole force reached the fixed position where they rested, protected by a general line of scouts, against whom the Turks kept up a desultory fire.

At 2 p.m., when the Grenadiers, who were the last to arrive, came up, the advance was resumed. The

11th debouched on the steeply undulating fields north of Fort Mesri, coming under a strong fire from a long trench parallel with its front. The Bersaglieri, under cover of some dwarf walls, opened fire, without however succeeding in dislodging the enemy. Time was passing, and information of the satisfactory progress of matters at Henni being received, at 3.30 p.m. they received the order to fix bayonets, and a few minutes later the battalion, with a yell of "Savoia," was charging the enemy's trenches. Not a shot was fired by the Turco-Arabs, who, with an instant's hesitation, turned and fled. The trenches were then occupied by the Italians, who at once filled with sand the bags they were carrying and improved the defence of the position they had won. The Turks meanwhile had halted at a distance and were firing from behind cover, without however doing any harm.

A short time after the mountain battery of the 50th opened fire upon Henni while the battalion rested. The enemy did not reply, and the advance was resumed by two battalions of Bersaglieri, one of Alpines and one of Grenadiers, who attacked Henni, well defended by Turks and Arabs. The engagement was warm while it lasted; the Arabs at one point getting behind the Bersaglieri and at very close quarters with them, not being able to use rifles, attacked with knives.

At 5 p.m. the Italians had broken down the defence, occupied Henni and its hill evacuated by the enemy, whom they chased through the village gardens and lanes, closing the day's operations. The 50th Regiment retired on Mesri by alternate units under cover of each other's fire against detachments of Turkish

troops, who kept up a desultory fire upon it from the direction of Ain Zara, upon which their main body had retired.

General Caneva was at Bu Meliana throughout the action.

IV

AIN ZARA

Am Russ is situated, roughly, 1 kilometre east of Sciara Sciat and the Italian outpost line; 2 kilometres south of it, a little below and to the east of Fort Mesri, are some old furnaces past which a road leads south-east 4 kilometres to Ain Zara in practically a straight line.

Ain Zara is, roughly, 8 kilometres from Tripoli itself, and its occupation was the objective of the Italian operations on December 4, 1911.

Preparatory to the advance of the land forces the Navy, anchored off the coast, shelled that portion of the oasis east of a line drawn from Am Russ to the furnaces, till 7 a.m., then a zone east of Lake Mellaha and the oasis of Tagiura. The lake is near the coast, 5 kilometres east from Sciara Sciat, and Tagiura is on the caravan road 6 kilometres farther east and about 1 kilometre from the coast.

The whole of the ground so shelled was very close and difficult, and afforded ample opportunity for large bodies of men to mass unobserved within it.

A ship was also detailed to watch the road leading from Zanzur to the west of the Italian position.

A Drachen balloon, sent up to scout and give the ranges during the action, regulated the fire.

The dispositions of the Italians were as follows :

The operations against Ain Zara were entrusted to the 1st Division under General Pecori-Giraldi, composed as follows :

On the right a mixed brigade under General Giardino consisting of 2 battalions of the 8th Regiment, 2 of the 40th Regiment, 2 squadrons Lodi Cavalry, 4 battalions Mountain Artillery, 2 companies of sappers, a detail of telegraphists, with commissariat and ammunition column.

On its left (centre) a mixed brigade under General Lequio, consisting of 2 battalions Grenadiers, 3 battalions (one Regiment) 11th Bersaglieri, and 1 battalion Alpini.

To facilitate the operations of the 1st Division a mixed Brigade under General Rinaldi consisting of 2 battalions of the 82nd, 2 battalions of the 84th and 1 Mountain Battery, was detailed (on the right) against the Turco-Arabs entrenched between Ain Zara and the oasis north and in front of it, with orders to keep in touch with the First Division on their right. Two battalions of the 52nd Infantry massed at Fort Mesri, to move against the right flank and rear of the enemy's trenches forming the objective of the Brigade Rinaldi.

The Menegin River, practically dry at this time and its bed indicated only by a succession of bogs, passed north of Ain Zara near the Turkish position, thence towards the Italian lines, cutting through them near the sea. The two Italian columns forming the 1st Division were to operate on the left of this river (W.), investing the left flank of the Turks by an enveloping movement, the third column (Rinaldi) operating on

the right bank (E.), and attacking the right of the Turkish position.

A battalion of the 37th Infantry and one of the 28th under General Frugoni formed a reserve at the Cavalry Barracks. The remaining troops were kept under arms within the outpost lines, and the city and suburbs of Tripoli were guarded by strong patrols in readiness for any possible rising.

General Pecori-Giraldi was in command of the whole of the advance.

At 5 a.m. on December 4 the troops formed up in a storm of wind and rain. At 5.20 the engineers of the Giardino Brigade began to lay a field telegraph; at 6 the cavalry led the advance, followed at 6.15 by the infantry. The light was very bad.

From the opening near Nesciat Bey's house the Bersaglieri of the Lequio Brigade advanced at the same time, followed by the Grenadiers and the Alpini. The last brigade to come out was Rinaldi's on the left. The rank and file carried their tents.

At 6.30 a.m. the Fort at Mesri opened fire against the Turkish line with its 149-mm. guns.

At 7 a.m. the scouts of the advance-guards of the three columns had deployed into a line in extended order in perfect accord between battalions and brigades. The advance was made at the double, from cover to cover.

The main bodies of the three columns once outside the outpost line had deployed into lines of companies, lying down under cover of the dunes, which formed a series of small hillocks and offered no target to artillery.

Their advance corresponded with the progress of their respective advance-guards.

2479.

Good lines and intervals were kept.

Shortly after 7 a.m. a portion of the scouts of the advance-guard of the centre column came into contact with some small detached Turkish posts, who immediately retired. Some minutes later these detached posts had joined their picket ; and began to fire from the crest of a dune. The Arabs were about fifty in number, and their fire was high and did no harm. The Bersaglieri replied, the Arabs moved to the left, presumably to rejoin their main body, but found their way stopped by the advance-guard of the Brigade Giardino, who had engaged another small Turkish force. The skirmish lasted a few moments, with one Italian casualty. The Arabs disappeared behind the dunes to their rear, and the Italian advance proceeded.

The advance had been initiated straight to the front in a line parallel to the Italian position from the west of Bu Meliana to beyond Mesri and directed south, but, in proceeding, a wheel was slowly made, so that the right and centre of the line would attack Ain Zara from the west, the left attacking from the north ; while the cavalry prolonged the extreme right of the attacking line with a view to enveloping the enemy.

The Brigade Giardino on the right accelerated its advance under fire, while the Brigade Lequio lengthened its halts. The movement was so well and carefully done that it became necessarily slow, and gave the Turks not only time to prepare their defence but to make dispositions for their ultimate retirement.

At 8 a.m. the Brigade Lequio was in touch with the main body of the enemy, who developed a steady fire action from well-prepared trenches. The first shrapnel fired from the Turkish position was aimed too

high, but the range was quickly corrected, and, shortly after, a shell exploded near a group formed by General Lequio and his staff, some of the bullets actually striking them without doing any harm. Another burst over the 33rd Company of Bersaglieri, wounding 8 men.

Fort Mesri, Mesri, the Krupp Batteries, the Battery at the Cavalry Barracks—something like thirty guns in all—were in action at 8.45 a.m.

The line at this time was waiting for the Brigade Rinaldi, which, last to come out of the trenches, impeded by the mudholes of the Menegin which it had to cross, as well as by difficult country, had lagged somewhat behind. The rain had stopped and the sun was shining, but it was very cold, and the sand, thoroughly soaked by the rain, stuck to the clothes of the men lying down and made the going heavy.

The Cavalry, in the meantime, had got within $1\frac{1}{2}$ kilometres of Ain Zara, and reported the trenches occupied by Turkish Regulars.

The fight livened in the centre, the Italian scouts having stumbled upon a long trench defended by Arabs and Turks, who opened a steady fire upon them at 500 yards.

Turkish troops were seen out of range moving left in extended order, and appearing and disappearing between the dunes.

A Mountain Battery of the centre brigade had by this also come into action, the Mesri Battery joining in and silencing the rifle fire of the trenches in front of this brigade, while an aeroplane passed over the opposing forces scouting.

The Turkish artillery—a 4-gun battery directly south

of the Furnaces, which had annoyed Mesri for days, and had been so well placed that, so far, it had not been located—continued to fire on the Italians with some effect.

On the right of the Italians the Turks were steadily advancing by well-regulated rushes, with the evident intention of turning that flank.

At 9.30 a.m. the Brigade Rinaldi, on the left of the 1st Division, were over the Minigen and out of its bed of mud and a battalion of the 82nd advanced at the double and extended, covering the front of the brigade. The artillery of the brigade opened fire upon the enemy, who, entrenched on the crest of some dunes, where the Italian infantry attacked him without troubling to return his fire.

Trench after trench was taken and the Turco-Arabs driven back.

At 10 a.m. the whole of the 1st Division had worked up to a good firing position.

With its extreme left reinforced, the Brigade Rinaldi was likewise well placed for a general advance, which the artillery of the attacking force were preparing for by a well-sustained fire.

The aeroplane had returned with useful information as to the enemy's position.

The Turkish artillery fired some further rounds in reply to the fire of the Italian artillery, but without effect. A few minutes later the Turks had vacated their advanced position and were in retreat beyond the range of the Italian guns which were working well in bad ground, changing position easily and rapidly according to the exigencies of the advance.

The Turks left their dead behind—a sure sign of

haste. Bags of cartridges, overcoats, bayonets, and canteens were also found in the evacuated trenches.

The advance was resumed ; while the 52nd, who had covered the advance of the Brigade Rinaldi, protecting its left flank, was compelled to engage towards the south margin of the oasis, east of the Furnaces, with Arab forces barricaded in houses, who threatened the Brigade's left flank, and the 1st Division in its turn had likewise to look after and drive back with its artillery an attack on its left flank by Turkish Regulars with Arabs behind them in the second line.

The advance was retarded to remove all obstacles, but progress was nevertheless made and at noon the Turkish Regular Infantry, unable to check the Italians, abandoned their advanced positions and began to retire in groups towards Ain Zara.

The advanced guard of the 1st Division arrived two kilometres from Ain Zara, facing east, at noon.

The Brigade Rinaldi, in contact with the 1st Division, was meantime beating, with its mountain artillery, the zone of trenches occupied by Turkish infantry immediately north of Ain Zara. In the distance Turkish columns were seen evacuating Ain Zara in full retreat east.

The ground was now a sea of sand, the hillocks or dunes forming the waves, with hollows between large enough to hide an army corps.

From crest to crest the Turkish forces were driven, and the Italian advance continued under cover of their artillery. The enemy's fire strengthened every time the Italian troops were in motion, but did not stop their progress.

At 12.30 p.m. the oasis of Ain Zara was distinctly seen,

its dunes, covered with green hedges and grass, became green hills, behind which the tops of palms showed. Beyond the oasis in a vast green plain were the tents of the Turkish Camp, then in complete confusion.

The semicircle of the attack narrowed at this point, as if embracing Ain Zara.

The Brigade Giardino, on account of the resistance met, was still somewhat behind, and the advance again slowed down to give them time, to the benefit of the Turks, who had begun retreating steadily under cover of both infantry and machine-gun fire.

At 1.35 p.m. a halt was made under cover by the main bodies of the Italian columns, during which the men had their rations. Ain Zara was still two kilometres off.

At 2 p.m. the Brigade Rinaldi was driving the Turks before it on the north of Ain Zara and the Brigade Giardino doing the same on the south. The reserve battalions of these brigades had not yet come into action.

At 2.40 p.m. the first lines of the Italian advance were in front of the last dune, strongly occupied by entrenched Turks, who opened fire on the Italian batteries coming into action. The first volley was replied to by shrapnel well directed in their midst, and they retired firing.

At 3 p.m. the action entered its definitive phases. The three brigades had closed up, and actually entered the trenches, driving the Turks from them with a bayonet attack. The extreme right, carrying out its enveloping movement, arrived at the summit of the last dune overlooking the Ain Zara oasis as the main body of the enemy were in full retreat south out of artillery range.

At 3.15 p.m. the final phase and general assault of the position by the first line of the Italian force eventuated.

There was no artillery fire at this stage, and the final charge was made at the double, met by desultory rifle-firing from the Turkish trenches occupied by the Turkish rearguard.

At 3.40 p.m. the whole of the Turco-Arabs were in full flight, abandoning their artillery, which was found casemated.

At 4 p.m. Ain Zara was occupied by the three brigades while the 52nd Regiment, having completed its mission, returned to its proper position within the line of the defences of Tripoli.

The operation, carried out by the Italians with precision throughout, appears to have lacked the necessary vigour.

During the operations one battalion of the 98th, with two companies of the 18th Infantry, reconnoitred towards Am Russ, and found it evacuated and its defences destroyed.

V

BIR TOBRAS

On December 17 information reached General Pecori-Giraldi, commanding at Ain Zara, that at the small oasis of Bir Tobras, over 200 Arabs, of whom about 50 were mounted, had established a camp and on the night of the 16th had captured some Arab families of the Sahel on their way to Ain Zara to surrender to the Italians.

Bir Tobras was stated to be less than three hours' march, in a southerly direction, from Ain Zara.

At Fonduc Ben Gascur, six hours' march from Ain Zara, another detachment of 150 Arabs, with 50 horsemen, was stated to be camped.

On December 18 further information was received that the force at Bir Tobras had been augmented by another 100 men.

General Pecori-Giraldi thereupon conceived the idea of punishing the raiders and freeing the captured families, both as an object-lesson and as a matter of important policy. Without communicating his intention to Tripoli Headquarters, and entirely on his own responsibility, he detached a column from his force with orders to march at night to Bir Tobras, surprise the Arabs soon after daybreak, and free their captives.

Taking into consideration the stated strength of the enemy and that although since the 18th some other groups might have joined them, its numbers would necessarily be limited by there only being two wells at Bir Tobras; General Pecori-Giraldi reckoned the enemy at 500 or 600 at the outside. He disregarded the contingency of their being reinforced during the action on account of the intended surprise forming the principal element of the intended operation.

He judged a force double that of the enemy necessary to rout it, but, as a precaution, he went beyond this and sent three battalions (two of the eleventh Bersaglieri and one of the 2nd Grenadiers) with 2 quickfirers, 1 squadron of Lodi Cavalry and a mountain section, in all 100 swords, 2 mountain guns, 2 quickfirers, and 1,800 rifles.

The information had set the distance at three hours' march, but a reconnaissance, by the 2nd Brigade on December 8, had taken four.

Pecori-Giraldi, taking into consideration the slowness of the night march, allowed five hours, and, ordering the column to move off at 3 a.m., reckoned on its arrival at decisive range of the position at 8 a.m. at the latest.

Detailed instructions were given the Officer Commanding Brigade from which the column was detached, Colonel Fara commanding the Bersaglieri and Senior Officer with the column being present.

The column got away at 2.45 a.m., December 19-20, 1911.

The Grenadiers furnished the advance-guard, followed by the cavalry, the Bersaglieri, who had with them the

artillery and quickfiring sections, then the mules and a small transport caravan.

They were led by four guides belonging to the Tripoli Political Military Office and by two chiefs of the Sahel Tribe whose families were amongst the captured.

The night was very cold, a strong wind blowing, which not only impeded progress but created a lot of dust and increased the obscurity.

After a short march the guides and chiefs admitted having lost their way ; the column however proceeded by compass, but deviated from the true direction, and at daylight had to describe almost a circle to get to the objective, arriving at Bir Tobras after 10 a.m.

The enemy was found in an estimated strength of 1,000. The cavalry, which at daybreak had gone ahead of the column, was the first to get into touch with advanced posts of the enemy, upon whom the artillery opened fire.

Without previous indications, the low walls and cactus hedges on the margin of the oasis as well as the dunes in front were crowned by a mass of Arabs, who opened a well-sustained fire upon the Italians.

The Officer commanding the column notified the situation to the G.O.C. at Ain Zara by mounted messenger, but added that he could deal with it.

At 10.30 a.m. the Grenadiers deployed into skirmishing order and attacked the enemy.

An attempt being made by the Arabs to turn the left flank of the Italians, Colonel Fara sent there a battalion of Bersaglieri, who got beyond the Grenadiers in an endeavour to outflank and surround the Arabs. The latter retired slowly before them till, reinforced,

they were able to make a stand checking the Bersaglieri's advance.

At this stage a Turco-Arab column smartly moved out of cover, threatening the right flank of the Italians. Colonel Fara saw the movement and sent the other Bersaglieri Battalion to check it.

It was evident that the Turco-Arabs were in force, their front having developed 1½ kilometres or more. Some of the Arab cavalry, originally on the right flank, had moved to the left, where further reinforcements had come up to the firing.

A good many of the enemy were now Turkish Regulars, volley firing, steadily and well, by word of command.

The Italian commander, by this time, had realised that an advance of his force was impossible and that his object had completely failed.

The position of the Italians was this :

On the left the Grenadiers in a slight semicircle ; in the centre, the 33rd Battalion Bersaglieri ; on the right the 27th Battalion of the same Regiment, with its right refused to front the left of the long line of the enemy that was threatening to envelop it. The formation was practically in the shape of an elongated "S," on bad ground, dominated by the Turkish position and easy to surround. The extent of the enemy's front and its number had forced practically the whole of the Italian force into the firing line.

The Italian losses, so far, had been insignificant.

On the left, north-north-east of the position, was a slight grassy hill, and, behind it, a series of dunes. This hill, being more elevated and, consequently, more difficult to attack, offered the Italians a better position.

At 11.30 a.m., in view of the development of the situation and the superiority of the force opposing him, Fara decided to withdraw his troops to the new position, as best he could.

The movement was carried out gradually by alternate squads, each of whom retired under the protection of the fire of the other. It was a very difficult movement in view of the situation. The Bersaglieri were the first to initiate it.

The ground towards the hill was quite open and the Italians began to drop under the fire of the Arabs, who, profiting by the situation, were advancing to new and closer positions.

This increased the difficulties of the retiring force, as the wounded had to be carried while the enemy was getting nearer.

At one time the situation became very critical; scattered groups of Italians had begun to halt and were returning the fire, deaf to orders. Some units were getting behind, others were losing their alignment and masking the fire of the protecting troops. Some of the transport mules were getting hit and becoming difficult to manage. All semblance of formation was about to disappear, threatening disaster, when Colonel Fara, catching a horse, mounted and, dashing to the front and galloping from unit to unit, rallied the Bersaglieri, restoring something like order. On them and under cover of their fire the retiring force, little by little, resumed their formations and discipline prevailed once more.

At 12.30 p.m., one hour from the initiation of the movement, the new position was occupied and the Italians were entrenching. Neither dead nor wounded had been left behind by them.

The Turco-Arabs counter-attacked repeatedly during the afternoon, but were driven back with loss. Their fire was very vigorous, but high, the bullets falling behind the hill into the dunes where the ambulance and transport were halted under cover.

The Turks tried to surround the position and more particularly to turn its flanks, so that the Italians finished by forming three sides of a square. The attack concentrated on the right angle, where the Bersaglieri and Grenadiers formed a salient at the apex of which the two mountain guns had been placed. The quickfirers had jammed earlier in the day and were useless.

At one time the Turks got so close to the Italians' position that one of the mountain guns was too far back to fire into them. It was brought forward by hand, without cover, under a hail of bullets.

Colonel Fara watched this manœuvre from the top of the redoubt which had been thrown up round the gun, without being hit, although he seemed to have a good many narrow escapes.

Every attack, well-ordered and sustained at the start, had got thinner as it neared the objective, till the Italian fire stopped it.

At 1.30 p.m. two officers of the Grenadiers, who were away in Tripoli on leave when the column left, and who had ridden out to it on their return, arrived. Colonel Fara sent the following message to Ain Zara by one of them :

"Counter-attacked by superior force. Holding my own. Short of ammunition."

This officer had two horses shot under him before he

could get away from the hill, but managed to ride off on a third. He arrived at Ain Zafa with the message at 6 p.m. and General Pecori-Giraldi sent at once the rest of the mixed brigade with 2 batteries, half a squadron cavalry, medical services, ammunition, water, etc., to the relief of the column.

As the afternoon progressed the Turkish attacks grew more pressing, and Colonel Fara sent two other messages for reinforcements. The shortage of ammunition was becoming serious and a good many rifles had become unserviceable on account of the sand. The Italians had almost ceased to fire and had fixed bayonets in expectation of a final attack.

The attacking force had by then assumed the shape of a curve and was in three lines, the first in extended order, the second also at intervals but not so widely extended, and the third almost in close order, in reserve, half hidden by the vegetation of the oasis which afforded them natural cover.

As evening drew on, the Italian guns, immediately behind the infantry, resumed firing shrapnel over them at as close range as 100 metres. The enemy, to judge from the sounds which appeared to come from immediately below the position, was quite close to the Italian trenches.

At 7 p.m. the fight was still continuing, the flashes of rifle fire of the attacking force delineating an almost continuous line.

At 9 p.m., when the Turco-Arabs ceased fire, the Italians had repulsed three further attempts to take their position.

At 10 p.m. a desultory renewal of fire took place, lasting a quarter of an hour.

Shortly after midnight Colonel Fara held a short

consultation with the senior officers and decided to evacuate the position, retiring towards the expected reinforcements. He chose the risk of missing them in the darkness and allowing them to blunder into the enemy, to remaining in a position, almost without ammunition, no food or water, before an enemy vastly superior in numbers and able to bring reinforcements to the fight from Bu Selim, a few hours' march off.

Colonel Fara well knew the risk of abandoning the position, encumbered as he was with wounded, but took it. The empty ammunition cases were buried. The soldiers carried the few shrapnel left, the ribbons of the quickfirers and all other gun accessories, to free the mules for the transport of some of the wounded, others being carried on improvised stretchers.

At 4 a.m. everything was ready, the troops formed a square, the Grenadiers taking the front and right faces, the Bersaglieri the left and the rear.

So quietly was this done that the cavalry, which at the inception of the action had retired to the left some distance off, did not know of the retreat till they were called in.

As the column moved off, the fires of the bivouacs of the enemy were distinctly seen, also a light calling commanding officers together, which the Italians had already seen elsewhere on two other occasions, and the meaning of which they understood.

At dawn some rifle firing was heard in the distance ; it was the enemy attacking the empty position !

At 7 a.m. the relieving column met the retiring force and returned to camp with them. Ain Zara was then $2\frac{1}{2}$ hours off.

Losses : wounded, 2 officers and 100 men ; 6 men dead. The dead were buried on the field.

A criticism of the O.C.-in-Chief on the subject of this reconnaissance was as follows :

(a) That the reconnaissance should not have been initiated at night in unknown ground, of which inaccurate maps were held, where points and localities were difficult to establish in daylight, and with untrustworthy native guides. The delay of the relieving column who marched off in daylight affirms this.

(b) The proportion of the three arms was not right ; with three battalions of infantry and a squadron of cavalry a whole mountain battery should have been sent and not a section. Given the mobility of this class of artillery, the progress of the column would not have been retarded by it.

(c) The Officer commanding the detached Column had definite orders to effect a surprise. He should not have persisted in carrying out the operation when its predestined element had completely failed owing to his late arrival.

(d) The Officer commanding the detached Column was satisfied with a casual cavalry reconnaissance, pushed only to the margin of an oasis of large extent. The existence of this unexplored oasis should have made the officer commanding cautious in arriving at the decision to attack, especially as information was to hand that the Turks were in four localities close to Bir Tobras. The mobility of the enemy was not taken into consideration.

(e) No information on the subject of this operation was given to the Commander-in-Chief till 6.25 p.m.

of the day of the action, that is to say when the column was in difficulties and the time too late for effective intervention. A change of the general situation might have obtained, which, in the opinion of the Commander-in-Chief, might have rendered the operation inadvisable, if not positively damaging.

(f) It is beyond understanding how, in view of the late arrival of the column at Bir Tobras and, later, of its non-return to Ain Zara, some steps were not taken by the general officer commanding division there to obtain news of it. It would probably have been possible to have sent assistance in time.

(g) There was no communication whatever between the Officer commanding Division and the Flying Column.

General Pecori-Giraldi replied as follows :

(a) To surprise the enemy was the first object of the column. This could not have been effected by a daylight march, with a vigilant enemy knowing the ground thoroughly.

The guides were furnished by headquarters, and the two chiefs who accompanied the column had their families in the hands of the enemy. The good faith of these men was proved in their guiding the Column back to Ain Zara on the night of its retirement.

(b) I took into consideration that the way was over shifting dunes, where loaded horses sank to their knees and cavalry had to dismount, and I did not want to impede the march of the column by attaching to it a whole battery. I knew also that the enemy had no guns. In my conception of the operation the guns were intended merely to accelerate the surprise and

flight of the enemy, from whom no resistance was expected.

(e) All previous reconnaissances in force carried out on the 8th, 10th, 12th and 17th had been on my own initiative. In this case it really meant anticipating the departure of a reconnoitring column by three or four hours.

(f) The delay in arriving at Bir Tobras came to my knowledge only at 3.30 p.m. of the 20th. I had no anxiety until then, as the custom was for our reconnaissances in force to return at sundown. Believing the operation successful, I held that the column was bringing back women and children and that their progress would necessarily be delayed thereby. Without any news I could not suppose that the operation had been carried out contrary to orders and failed. If the Officer commanding Flying Column had advised me at daylight of the situation and of his intention to attack notwithstanding the failure of the intended surprise, the news would have reached me by 10 and I could have provided by additional troops against contingencies.

It was the duty of the Officer commanding detached Column to send me information, not mine to seek it. In the changed situation, his assumed initiative, for which he had become solely responsible, should have been notified me.

At 3.30 I received information from him concluding : "I am disengaging the troops and reckon on being at Ain Zara during the evening."

Interrogating the messenger on the subject of the need of reinforcements, he told me the matter had suggested itself to Colonel Fara, but he had put the

idea aside as reinforcements could not reach him before dark.

I considered the idea of sending the remaining 3 battalions and 10 guns of the mixed brigade, but I knew they could not possibly leave camp under an hour (4.45), and at 5.30 it would be dark. They would not be expected by the Flying Column, who had decided not to ask for them; and, marching in the dark, it was quite possible that the two columns might meet and fire on one another.

When, at 6 p.m., the request for reinforcements reached me, I did not, however, hesitate in sending them without delay.

General Lequio, commanding the Brigade, was late in getting away, owing to the difficulty in loading guns and transport on mules in the dark. He deemed it wise to march off in square and this also caused delay.

It was 9 p.m. when the relieving column started.

In the morning I moved personally to the assistance of the two columns with the remainder of the 1st Division. I had news from the 1st Column that it was retiring in good order; of the 2nd I had no news whatever.

(g) There were three ways of securing information: by field telephone; by helio; by cavalry.

The first meant delay and difficulty in advancing the telephone waggons over shifting dunes.

With regard to the second, the land is flat, intercepted by small dunes of equal height, which would have necessitated a great number of stations. There was also the possibility of attracting the attention of the enemy, who would certainly endeavour to surprise

the posts, to whom valid protection could not be afforded.

I therefore selected the cavalry, ordering the formation of posts every 45 metres. Through these cavalry patrols I received on the 19th, at 3.40, news of the first phase of the action; at 5.10, news of the situation; at 6.15, a demand for reinforcements.

On the 20th, at 6 a.m., I received news of the situation of the Fara Column at 1.30 a.m. This patrol took a long time as, riding by the Polar Star, it made towards Tripoli, and had to retrace part of its way.

At 7.45 another patrol brought me news of the meeting of Colonel Fara and the Column under General Lequio.

VI

GARGARESCH

Gargaresch is, roughly, 6 kilometres east of Tripoli, close to the seashore, and outside the Italian line of fortifications. Close to it are quarries from which the stone required for works in Tripoli is drawn, and the Italian troops were constructing a redoubt to defend these quarries.

A working party, consisting of one company of engineers, advanced to the quarries on the morning of January 18, 1912, under a protecting force moving in lozenge formation, and composed of 1 squadron of Guides forming the point, 3 battalions of Grenadiers, forming the two forward sides, 3 battalions of the 52nd the two rear faces, and 1 squadron of Guides the rear point. In the centre were disposed a Mountain Battery (4 guns) a section of Field Artillery, Transport and Army Medical details.

The Arabs were found in possession of the quarries, but retired before the advance of the Italians after some desultory firing, bearing to the left and almost crossing the whole front of the Italian column.

A section of the Mountain Battery was detached and took up a position on a height to the left, a little way from the oasis lying between the Italian force and the quarry, and opened fire on the retiring Arabs to some effect.

The Italian advance continued without further interruption. The Guides extended and reconnoitred the oasis, which was found vacant. The quarries were then occupied and work on the redoubt resumed, the protecting force taking up a position as follows :

The battalions of Grenadiers 3 kilometres in front of the quarries in a long entrenched line, with the Guides on the extreme left.

On a height flanking the oasis, on the right, and about 1 kilometre in front of the quarries, the 52nd and the Field Artillery Section, for whom working parties began a redoubt.

The balance of the Mountain Battery had rejoined the first section on the height, to the left ~~of~~ the oasis.

At 11 a.m., while the Italians were eating their rations, the Turco-Arabs were again sighted at a distance of about 5 kilometres. They were divided into columns of strong companies, marching in line at wide intervals, keeping a good direction and making a steady advance towards the Italian force. Their line was well kept and their advance covered by a screen of horsemen widely extended.

The Field Guns of the Italians opened fire on the enemy. The first shell fell too far, the second was well aimed and effective, but did not stop the advance of the Turks.

The Italian Mountain Batteries joined in the fire but, owing to the wide front of the enemy, the Italian Artillery, though doing damage, did not succeed in checking the advance of the Turkish force, who reached cover behind a line of dunes 1,800 metres from the first line of the Italian position.

The ground between was slightly undulating and afforded some cover.

The Grenadiers opened a well-nourished fire, returned steadily by the Turks. The latter were estimated at 2,000, including a few hundred Arabs and about 100 horses.

The Turkish line resumed its advance, in shape something like a semicircle, halting closer under excellent cover and converging its fire on the Grenadiers.

This method of attack in line, without apparently having anything behind it, was somewhat of a departure from the usual Turkish tactics, and while awaiting its development the Officer Commanding the Italians ~~kept~~ two companies of the 52nd on the left of the Grenadiers in reserve. The balance of the Regiment formed a general reserve to the Grenadiers.

The Field Guns, meantime, kept up their fire against the Turks to good effect, retarding though it did not stop their advance.

The Italian Mountain Battery were, in the changed situation, able to come into action against the right of the Turks only. Its fire, however, caused a crowding of the Turks out of range of the guns and towards the centre.

The Turks were on higher ground than the Italians, and some of the Grenadiers lying in the trenches were hit in the feet. From a dune a number of Arabs descended to the front in an attempt to resume the advance; others, scattered parties, followed. A large section of the line thereupon rose to advance, but the fire of the Grenadiers was too hot and many men only rose to fall again.

The advance was checked by the Grenadiers alone,

but the Turks maintained their position for an hour and a quarter.

The Italian ammunition supply service was very good, though the carriers, for the most part of the time, had to move without cover.

At 2 p.m. the Turkish forces rapidly effected a sweeping movement with their left, whence they advanced in somewhat of a circle, in an attempt to outflank the right of the Italians.

The Grenadiers steadily refused the threatened flank and assumed a new formation with their right resting secure on the seashore, successfully checking the attempt to turn their flank.

Fire action slackened as the Turks initiated the second phase of the engagement.

They converged their fire against the centre of the Italians and massed against it with marvellous rapidity in an endeavour to break through that portion of the Grenadier line. It was their evident intention to attract Italian attention to their centre to cover an attempt on their part to outflank the left of the Italians, to which they had transferred their attention and on which a vigorous attack was about to be concentrated.

The two companies of the 52nd, so far held in reserve on the left, moved up and deployed into a semicircle, prolonging the Grenadiers and up to the height where the Mountain Battery was in position.

The enemy moving to the left was at this stage out of rifle range, its formation too extended and its mobility too great for the Italian Artillery to do much damage to him.

At 3 p.m. the Turks had succeeded in reaching the position aimed at for the initiation of the proposed

out-flanking movement and began to advance. The company of the 52nd on the extreme left of the Italian position opened fire on them at 1,600 metres.

The Turkish line was in the shape of an arc, the furthest point of which was 2,500 metres distant from the Italian line.

The Field Artillery section opened fire with shrapnel and checked the Turkish advance, with some loss to it. But only for a short time, as, by this, a hot general attack had developed and about 300 Turkish Regulars made a bold attempt to take the field guns. The fire of the 52nd diminished their number but did not stop them.

~~The~~ Mountain Batteries further back could not fire at the Turks for fear of hitting their own infantry.

The Turks at 900 metres concentrated their fire on the gunners. Seven were hit and one gun left with a sergeant only. A horse was shot while retiring the limbers.

The guns were repeatedly hit and were red-hot and unserviceable, having in half an hour fired close on 300 rounds—the last at 200 metres range.

With the Turks at that close range a company of the 52nd, detached from the General Reserve, suddenly took up a position on a rise behind the guns, dominating the Turkish advance and opened a steady fire into the Turks who by this had crowded together.

The Italian line, profiting by the momentary hesitation of the Turks in face of the unexpected fire, fixed bayonets and charged them. The Turks gave way and, after an attempt to re-form 200 metres back, unable to withstand the rush of the Italians, retired in confusion until they reached their first position, at

1,800 metres from which the attack was initiated, and which they reoccupied under the fire of the Mountain Battery.

Their original line modified, the Turks were now broken into two parts, the southern half initiating a retirement and disclosing their strength once out of cover. The Mountain Battery took advantage of this and did good work. The rest of the Turkish Infantry continued the movement southward, withdrawing slowly, in very good order and without firing, to 2,300 metres.

The Turkish Cavalry, which had not come into action, had to come out of shelter to follow the retirement, being shelled by the Mountain Battery, who got the range and caused them losses.

At 5.15 p.m. a group of Arabs re-opened fire on the Italians from behind the crest of one of the dunes. The fire did not last very long, and it was evidently a rear-guard protecting the retreat of the Turkish troops on Zanzur, some 10 kilometres south-west of Gargaresch.

VII

GARGARESCH AND AIN ZARA

The Turks preparatory to the attack which followed made a careful reconnaissance on the night of January 27-28 with the object of making sure that their intention had not become known to the Italians and that there were no troops outside the trenches awaiting the attack, to counter-attack in flank.

This reconnaissance was carefully and skilfully carried out by a small force of about 100, amongst whom were a good many officers.

At 11 p.m. this reconnaissance had touched Gargaresch, advancing right up the entanglements. They were seen by a sentry of the 82nd and some shots were exchanged for some ten minutes.

The bright moonlight made objects very clear.

Having accomplished their mission and ascertained that the ground was clear, the Turks retired east towards Bu Meliana.

After the intervening zone had been cautiously explored, and the whole front had been found unoccupied, the reconnoitring force retired, after cutting all telegraph and telephone communications with Tripoli.

The Turkish attack followed when the moon set.

The Italians had no information of the intended attack and only the sentries were awake.

A sentry of the 50th saw a moving shadow in the entanglement, and fired at it, giving the alarm. The enemy advanced to 200 yards from the trenches and a hail of lead passed over them in answer to the sentry's shot. Without orders, quietly and rapidly, in a minute from the first shot the Italian trenches were manned.

The Turks were in position on a hill opposite called "45" from its height, with their main body farther south some 600 yards from the position from which the main attack subsequently developed. This hill was occupied in the daytime by the Italian outposts, and the Turks were actually using the trenches dug by the Italians.

The Italian searchlights came into action and caused some confusion to the attacking force. Turks and Arabs, on coming within the shaft of light, ceased fire to seek cover.

The Italian Mountain Battery followed the searchlight, firing shrapnel at the enemy disclosed by it.

The main attack of the Turks began as soon as the attack from "45" was checked.

On the east the 50th and on the south the Grenadiers came into action against them. The second attack was not pushed home. It lasted 40 minutes and then ceased suddenly.

The searchlights after this could find no trace of the enemy, who apparently was hiding behind the dunes, seeking to lessen the Italian vigilance by inspiring them with the belief that they had been finally repulsed and had abandoned all idea of further operations. Their intention, however, was to attack again at dawn and they wished this attack to have every element of surprise.

At 5 a.m. the Italians returned to their tents.

At 6 a.m. the Turco-Arabs came suddenly into action again on the whole of the Italian front, the north excepted, attacking from the south.

In a little over two hours, with remarkable mobility, they had practically enveloped the whole of the Italian front.

The trenches were again manned rapidly by the Italians. Day had not yet broken and the darkness had intensified, preceding the dawn.

The attack was strong on the left, where the trenches were defended by the 40th Infantry and where the fire of the Italian Infantry produced the greatest effect on the enemy who had crowded together in force.

With the exception of small parties the enemy remained at from 800 to 1,000 yards—though, occasionally, groups broke the line and came to 500 or 600 yards, where the fire of the Italians stopped them.

At daylight the whole of the Italian Artillery came into action. The attack was repulsed, the Turkish forces retiring behind the highest of the dunes, south-east of Ain Zara, from which a desultory fire, doing no harm, was kept up on the Italian trenches.

At 7 a.m. the enemy had rapidly moved in force to the south-west of the Italian position and were again attacking it from that quarter. They advanced to within 800 metres, but were driven back by artillery fire.

The Turkish Infantry were firing steadily, advancing alternately by rushes and taking every advantage of cover afforded by the dunes. The Arabs changed position singly after every round fired, to disturb the enemy's ranges.

At 7.30 a.m. the attack slackened, an hour later the Turco-Arabs were in full retreat, followed by the fire of the Italian guns.

At 7.30 a.m. a strong column of Turks and Arabs had been sighted from the Italian position moving north in echelon formation with transport. This column was evidently intended for the outflanking of Ain Zara, or for an attempted attack in rear, under cover of the attack on the south-west.

The failure of the latter attack was evidently communicated to it, as it changed direction and followed the other troops in their retreat south. Not quickly enough, however, to avoid the fire of the Italian battery of heavy guns mounted at Ain Zara, which had also taken up the fire against the other columns in retreat after they had got out of range of the Mountain Batteries. This battery continued firing until 10 a.m.

At 11 a.m. the Ain Zara force sent out its usual outpost to the hills, which had been occupied earlier in the day by the enemy, the action being practically over.

The Italians had a General reserve massed at the Cavalry Barracks some 6 kilometres in rear. Local reserves from the 50th, 40th and 6th Infantry Regiments and a battalion of Alpini did not come into action.

At 11.30 the Turks again opened fire against the Italian position at long range, continuing until 1, evidently to mask their retreat and protect the withdrawal of the wounded and dead.

Groups of the enemy's retiring cavalry were in sight of the furnaces after they became invisible from Ain

Zara, and the Battery of heavy guns at the former locality followed them with shrapnel fire.

The Turks and Arabs were in an estimated strength of from 6,000 to 7,000.

The Italian losses were 2 dead and 8 wounded.

VIII

H O M S

At midnight of February 1-2, 1912, a demonstration was made by the Turco-Arabs against the Italian fortifications, west of Homs.

The Italian Field Artillery replied to the rifle fire of the enemy, silencing it. A quarter of an hour later, both the west and south-west trenches, which were close to the town on account of the limited number of defenders available, were attacked in force.

The whole of the Italian line came into action under a rain of shrapnel fired by a Turkish battery placed on the Mergheb, a difficult hill, its crest 175 metres high, about 5 kilometres south-west of the town, which it dominates. Heavy rifle fire from Turkish regular infantry and Arab levies in position on this hill co-operated with the batteries, in preparing the way for and supporting the attack of the Infantry. The firing was high and did no damage to the Italians, the shells bursting beyond their lines.

The attacking infantry, composed of Arabs with a good stiffening of Turkish Regulars, advanced under cover of the fire of their artillery to within a few hundred yards of the Italian forts, to be met by the fire of the whole of the Italian Artillery, with deadly results to

the Arabs who, having departed from their original formation, had crowded together.

Their advance was checked. The searchlights mounted on the Italian fortifications were extremely useful, disclosing every movement of the attacking force.

The fortress guns (149 mm.) also came into action, firing grenades on the enemy's position on the Mergheb, and silencing its battery there.

The Turco-Arabs, checked, hesitated and then retired, followed by the fire of the batteries, which converted the retreat into a flight.

The Turks occupied the whole of the Mergheb and, almost without truce, harassed the Italians.

When the Italians first occupied Homs they dislodged the Turks from the Mergheb, but, not being in sufficient force, they had to evacuate the position and the Turks reoccupied it.

At the beginning of January the Turks fired two shrapnel shots from the Mergheb right into the town of Homs, without however doing any damage ; and this happened regularly every night afterwards till the Italians erected a battery of heavy siege guns and on January 12, the Turkish battery having drawn their fire, discontinued its practice.

The general position was however unsatisfactory, and the Italians having received reinforcements the operations of February 27, 1912, were decided upon.

Sliten is a harbour some 50 kilometres south-east of Homs, the intervening country being known as the Sahel, whence the Turkish forces had obtained numerous recruits.

On February 26 a prearranged naval demonstration

was made against Sliten by an Italian cruiser escorting an empty transport. The object was to induce the Turks to detach a portion of their force from the Mergheb to repel the presumed landing.

Between 1 and 2 p.m. of the 26th, the two ships, anchored 1,000 metres from the shore at Sliten, opened fire against it. Towards evening boats were lowered and, filled with men, moved slowly towards the shore to give the Arabs the impression of a landing under cover of the guns of the cruiser.

This manœuvre attracted numerous groups of Arabs, hitherto under cover of the dunes, towards the shore, in readiness to repel the presumed landing. At dark, however, the boats, which had kept out of range of the shore force, were recalled and hoisted up without any one from the shore seeing it; in fact the Arabs fully expected a night attack.

The searchlights of the cruiser, and its guns fired at regular intervals, kept the Arabs on the alert throughout the night.

At daylight of the 27th the bombardment was strongly renewed and the boats, once more lowered, made again towards the shore, coming into contact with the Arabs, who by this time had marched to the firing and entrenched there in great numbers.

No landing was attempted, and at 11.15 a.m. the boats were recalled in accordance with previous instructions and the bombardment ceased.

At 4 p.m. a wireless message was received from Homs by the captain of the cruiser notifying the taking of the Mergheb by the Italians, recalling the cruiser to Homs and sending the transport to Naples—its original destination.

To return to the Mergheb. The crest of the Mergheb had been permanently occupied by an observation post of some forty men of the Turkish forces. Beyond, towards Bu Sceifa, was the main body of the Turkish regulars some 500 to 600 in strength, with two mountain guns.

In case of necessity this force could be reinforced by several thousand Arabs and Bedouins from the surrounding country, including the Sahel—a perfect system of signalling from point to point having been arranged.

Given the mobility of the Arabs, and their knowledge of the country, the objective of any Italian operations against the Mergheb could be reached by the Arab and Bedouin reinforcements in less time than the Italians could get there, across the valley between it and Homs. It was therefore necessary for the latter to surprise the position, initiating the first portion of the operation under cover of darkness.

Under the circumstances it was impossible for the Italian Artillery either to prepare or to cover the advance of the Infantry.

The Italian forces were disposed as follows :

In the centre a column, composed of the 89th Infantry with quickfirers, a battalion of Alpini, a mountain battery and half a company of Sappers. Their objective was the Turkish position on the crest of the mountain, which they had orders to attack and occupy. The 89th had arrived on February 11 and never been in action before.

On the right, echeloned on the right flank of the central column, a column of one battalion of the 6th Infantry and one of the 37th, with a section of quickfirers.

On the left a column of the 8th Regiment of Bersaglieri (3 battalions less 1 company), with quickfiring. Its objective was the west side of the slope of the Mergheb, on which it was ordered to make a holding attack, concurrent with the attack of the central column on the crest.

Orders were given to advance in absolute silence, or with as little noise as possible.

The way lay through the valley between Homs and the Mergheb. Overlooking this valley, two spurs of the Mergheb jut out east and west, descending gently towards the plain. On these two spurs were directed the flank columns.

The attacking force comprised practically the whole of the Italian garrison of Homs, three companies alone being left in the trenches. Two batteries of field artillery and one battery of howitzers remained in position at Homs ready to support the advance with their fire as soon as it reached the foot of the rise. One of the field artillery batteries was ready to advance as soon as necessity arose.

The three columns moved off immediately before daybreak and came into action with mathematical precision.

The centre column initiated its march with two battalions in the first line, furnishing their own supports, a mountain battery and two battalions in reserve 400 metres behind.

Two battalions were also placed in the first line by the left column, who retained one battalion in reserve.

The right column sent ahead one battalion, keeping the other in reserve with the duty to maintain contact with the centre column.

At daybreak the Italians were seen and fired upon. They did not reply, to avoid delay to the advance which, as far as the ground permitted, was now made at the double. The advance-guard of the Bersaglieri reached the west slope of the Mergheb and opened fire contemporaneously with the appearance of the advance-guard of the right column on the eastern and northern slopes of the mountain, and, with surprising precision, the scouts of the Alpini and of the 1st battalion of the 89th leading the central column, after a keen race between them over the last part of the way, arrived at the same time on the Mergheb itself.

The surprise, the accord between the columns, in fact the whole manœuvre itself could not have been either more complete or more exact.

The battalion of the 6th, at the head of the right flank column, entrenched itself on the right ridge and the battalion of the 37th defiled behind it to come into action in support of the central attack.

The Turco-Arabs were every moment increasing in strength. Their various positions on the left of the mountain itself, in the valleys behind it, and particularly on the crest of a hill to the right, had all come into action with a well-nourished, if not well-aimed fire.

The Mountain Battery following the two battalions of the central column co-operated with the Infantry to a great extent, disturbing the aim of the enemy and neutralising its rifle fire, which, shortly after the commencement of the action, reached a maximum intensity. After two halts to fire, the battery reached the top, where it came into action for a time without cover, losing an officer and four gunners, the Turks

having concentrated their fire upon it. While the Turks were well protected at this stage, the rocky nature of the ground rendered the construction of temporary cover very difficult for the Italians, who worked practically in the open.

It became evident that the Turco-Arabs could not be driven back by the frontal fire of the Italians.

The battalion of the 37th with its quickfirers advanced from the right in an endeavour to enfilade the left of the enemy. The Turco-Arabs saw the movement and commenced to fall back, first slowly, then, as the quickfirers came into action against them, much more rapidly.

Some groups who, tempted by the excellent cover afforded by the ground, delayed their retreat to fire at the advancing Italians, were wiped out.

In the meantime, a warm action had developed on the left against the Bersaglieri, with whose endeavours to strengthen the conquered position a steady fire from the entrenched Turks interfered considerably for a time. Ultimately, with a bayonet charge, the Bersaglieri drove back to the neighbouring hills this section of the Turco-Arab force.

The Turco-Arabs retreated on the line of hills north of the Mergheb beyond a small valley, leaving behind for a time that portion of their force in contact, on the right, with the 6th Infantry Regiment, who ultimately drove them back with the bayonet.

The action was renewed, and reached its culminating point at 2.30 p.m. The Turco-Arabs, estimated at over 4,000, driven back earlier in the day, had returned with reinforcements, who had either marched to the firing or answered the signals to assemble. Repeated

bayonet charges scattered them, but they re-formed the moment the Italians, held well in hand to avoid disintegration in the difficult ground, ceased their pursuit.

The Italian Artillery fired at very close range, continuously shifting their position on account of the moving target.

The quickfirers literally ploughed lanes through the Arabs, without doing more than momentarily check them.

At 3 p.m. a general bayonet assault made by the Italians finally routed the enemy.

The Italians fortified the conquered position without loss of time, and before evening had actually emplaced a field battery, literally dragged up there.

Shortly after 7 p.m., under cover of darkness, the Turks made an attempt to surround the position, but found the flanks too well protected and failing to penetrate the defence again retired.

The battle was a triumph for the bayonet, the enemy, brave as a lion before the fire of the Italians, giving way before the shock of the charge of the attacking force.

The excellence of the organisation of the Italian troops was specially noticeable. When the infantry reached the position on the top of the hill in the morning, not only the ammunition supply column but a bottle of mineral water for each man were immediately available.

While the first line was engaged a wheeled transport carrying eight searchlights, tents, bedding, poles and barbed wire, with bricks and mortar for the emplacement of the guns, left Homs for the foot of the Mergheb,

where mules were ready to take the load, the sappers having enlarged the narrow track to the summit, over which the Field Artillery were later dragged up.

During one of the bayonet charges happened the chief episode of the battle. A group of about 100 Turkish Regulars, surprised by the rapidity of the attack, had not been able to get away. They were hidden in a kind of covered way, on a spur of the mountain.

A section of mountain artillery, following the retreat, without knowing of their presence, took up a position 50 paces from them. The Turks suddenly opened fire upon it, following it up with a bayonet charge on the guns. Some pursuing Alpini, luckily for the Italian gunners, saw the trouble and came to the rescue of the pieces, which, notwithstanding casualties, were still in action firing with an elevation at zero, though the position was well-nigh untenable.

Rapidly the Alpini surrounded the Turks, and while the artillery stopped firing, charged them. The encounter was a brief one; numbers carried the day and the Turks were wiped out.

After the artillery had taken up a position on the Mergheb some infantry descended into the valley between the Mergheb and the position towards Bu Sceifa, to which the Turks had retired, to dislodge them.

The advance of the Italians into what seemed a trap easy to surround by troops of the mobility of the Turks, and the constant arrival of reinforcements inspired the Turks to a local counter-attack. The Italians thereupon divided and rapidly fell back on either side of the Mergheb, clearing the range and leaving the

Turks under the fire of the hill. The latter, believing the Italians in retreat, impetuously counter-attacked the Mergheb, to be again driven back with loss.

During the engagement the Italian ambulance did excellent work, picking up the wounded, without distinction.

Many of the Italians were found wounded in the head and right arm. They had been hit while engaged under fire in constructing redoubts.

At nightfall, two battalions of the 8th Bersaglieri and the 6th Infantry Battalion were, as a precaution withdrawn from the Mergheb into Homs.

The losses of the Italians were 14 dead, amongst whom 2 officers ; and 100 wounded, amongst whom 11 officers.

The force was under the command of General Reisoli.

One of the first tasks of the Italians was to fortify the Mergheb positions against probable further assaults by the Turks.

They did so effectively, considering the brief time which elapsed between February 27, the day on which the position was won by them, and March 4.

The defence included entanglements, some 200 metres beyond which 8 mines were laid.

During the night of March 4-5, the Turks had made several half-hearted attacks against the flank of the position, where the defences were in an incomplete state. Easily repulsed, they had retired and camped 3 kilometres at the back of a hill beyond the Mergheb, 4 kilometres distant from the Italian position.

From here the Turkish force, composed of Arab irregulars commanded by Turks, moved to the attack

on the evening of the 5th to 6th. An angle of dead ground allowed them to descend their hill and work up again unseen, almost to the Italian position.

The attacking force were in a loose and irregular formation, with a front covering about 2 kilometres.

Between 9 and 10 p.m. they were picked up by the Italian searchlights, and without checking their advance—in fact hastening—they opened a heavy rifle fire, doing little or no damage.

The Italians, who had been at their post since dawn awaiting the attack, were at the time asleep in their trenches, which ran from the sea up the slopes of the Mergheb on one side and down to the sea on the other—roughly, in the shape of a triangle, within which was Homs.

The moon had just risen, and the Arabs, still firing rapidly, though with very little effect, continued their ascent towards the summit of the Mergheb, until they came under the Italian fire at close range, in a fairly close formation.

Their advance was momentarily arrested by well-directed volleys and by the fire of the Mountain Battery graduated at zero; but the arrival of reinforcements ended the halt—in fact, the pressure from behind actually compelled the resumption of the advance, notwithstanding the telling fire of the Italians.

The whole of the position on the crest of the Mergheb occupied by the Italians was engaged.

The Arabs were repeatedly checked, but their advance was resumed each time after a brief halt. Their fire never slackened; they fought in a most determined manner.

At this stage the firing, by the Italians, of three of

the mines beyond the entanglements cut off the main body of the Turco-Arabs from their advanced parties, who then pushed forward right into the entanglements, where they were mown down by the Italian fire.

The mines had disposed of a good many of the attacking force. Valiant efforts were made by the remainder to come to the help of the advanced parties, but the explosions had opened up the ground and created obstacles which, coupled with the steady fire of the defence, baffled the desperate efforts of the Arabs to get to close quarters with the Italians.

At 3 a.m. the action slackened. The attacking force appeared to retire towards the east, but as soon as they reached cover they re-formed preparatory to an attack on the left of the position.

This attack eventuated vigorously shortly after, the Turks showing great bravery and returning to it time after time, to be repulsed by the Bersaglieri who manned this portion of the defences, and who were well protected by excellent earthworks.

Some of the Turco-Arabs, with great daring, actually climbed up and were bayoneted on the revêtements.

At the commencement of the engagement the cruiser *Siracusa* left Homs and anchored off the Mergheb. Her guns were able to shell the Turks when they moved to attack the left of the position.

Failing in this last attempt, the Turco-Arabs retired from the coastal zone once more to the central front, and, in close formation, delivered another desperate attack against that portion of the Italian defences—once more fighting their way right up to the entanglements.

The explosion of two more mines and the fire of the

Mountain Battery compelled their withdrawal with heavy loss.

They fell back finally at 6 a.m., south over the Sahel towards Bondara, 17 kilometres as the crow flies from Homs.

The Turks had known that the attack, to be successful, would have to culminate in a vigorous assault of the Italian position. It was their intention to surprise the Italians before they had time to appreciate the position. They were prepared for the massacre of the advance-parties of their attacking force, but calculated on sheer weight of numbers, added to the disorganisation of surprise, to carry the day.

The advance of the attacking force was hidden as long as possible, then shock tactics were adopted in an endeavour to take the positions at a run.

The attack was superb in its vigour and bravery, if hopeless in its folly.

The Italians had in action the 1st Battalion 89th Infantry, an Alpini Battalion, 2 Battalions Bersaglieri, 2 Batteries of Field Artillery and a Mountain Battery.

The engagement was fought under the light of almost a full moon. It reached its maximum intensity at 11 p.m.

The fire discipline of the Italians was very good throughout.

South of Homs, along and near the coast-line, about a kilometre from the town, is the first of two oases, the outer houses of which, fortified by the Italians, formed the eastern limit of the defences of the town. The vegetation of this oasis is rather scant and the

ground irregular. A small sandy plain divides this oasis from the larger one beyond it, occupied by the main body of an Arab force, to whom the thick vegetation, ruins and rough ground afforded many naturally strong positions.

Lebda is 3 kilometres south-east of Homs beyond the second oasis—a flourishing city seventeen centuries ago, now a ruin.

West of Lebda, 2 kilometres inland and practically in a line with it, is a group of small hills known as the Small or Red Hills. Following the coast, 3 kilometres south-east of Lebda, is "Hammangi," a hill dominating the surrounding country and the north-eastern slopes of which descend to the sea. Its southern slope descends to the limit of the oasis of Sliten, which, thick with palms and vegetation, follows the coast for nearly 20 kilometres.

After the occupation of the Mergheb by the Italians, the Turkish general staff had taken Lebda as a base of operations and caused the Italians considerable annoyance by intermittent sniping.

On May 1, 1912, General Reisoli decided to dislodge them.

The troops to whom the task was allotted were divided into three: one battalion each of the 6th and 37th Infantry, with a section of quickfirers on the left, to engage and delay the enemy within the two oases, with Lebda as its final objective; three battalions of the 8th Bersaglieri in the centre, to move along the foot of the southern slopes of the Mergheb south to the Red Hills thence east to Hammangi; two battalions of the 89th and one of Alpini (Mondovi) on the right, to remain in the neighbourhood of the

Mergheb to drive back any possible counter-attack and prevent reinforcements reaching the Turks at Lebda.

The Italians formed up at 4.30 a.m. on May 1-2. The first to move off was the 37th, followed by the 6th with the quickfirers. Once beyond the houses, the 37th deployed into line across the oasis, slowly sweeping through it.

The Bersaglieri moved off at 4.45, simultaneously with the third column, who took up a position between the Mergheb and the Red Hills.

No indication of the intended operation had reached the Turks, although they had plenty of spies within the Italian lines. The advance was noiseless, and the 37th actually got 100 metres within the Turkish line of outposts in the first oasis before they were seen and fired at. The Italians halted without firing, taking cover in a convenient ditch and behind some fallen palms.

The Turco-Arabs, some 500 strong, then prolonged beyond the front of the 37th in an attempt to outflank it, but were driven back.

At 5.10 the 37th had reached the outer margin of the second oasis. Slowly, to give time to the Bersaglieri who had the longest way to go, they made their way through it, wearing down the defence of the enemy. The hostile population of the oasis abandoned their houses and followed the retreating force. As many houses as possible were reconnoitred by the Italians on their way and found empty.

At daylight the 37th, then almost through the second oasis, saw the first of the Red Hills, and at that moment the Turco-Arabs discovered the Bersaglieri, who had

marched rapidly towards their objective intending to surprise and surround the enemy.

Leaving a portion of their force to deal with the 37th, the remainder, with remarkable mobility, changed front and came into action against the Bersaglieri, who were at this time crossing open ground and who did not trouble to reply but continued their advance at the double, their Colonel and Adjutant not even dismounting.

The garrison of the Mergheb in the meantime, reinforced by a section of naval quickfiring, had cleverly made a demonstration against some 500 of the enemy at the Mergheb, and was keeping them busy.

The cruiser *Siracusa* had arrived off the ruins of Lebda just as the battery of heavy guns at Homs lighthouse opened fire against the enemy's position there, to clear the way for the advance of the 37th.

At 5.30 sufficient reinforcements had reached the Turks from Sliten to enable them to initiate a counter-attack against the 37th, who replied by resuming their advance at the double. A ravine momentarily checked them and gave the Turks an opportunity to enfilade them; but they were slow to take advantage of it, and a company of the 6th coming up, the 37th got round the obstacle under cover of their fire and drove back the enemy.

The Bersaglieri had, by this, occupied the Red Hills, broken through the enemy's defence and initiated an enveloping movement. The Turks, seeing the danger of being surrounded, withdrew, at first in orderly groups, but as the approaching enemy became more pressing, in utter confusion.

A company of the 37th had meantime reached the

objective at Lebda. The battery at Homs thereupon ceased its fire, which was taken up by the guns of the *Siracusa*, who shelled the enemy in the zone east of Lebda.

The Bersaglieri had resumed their advance leaving the broken enemy to another company of the 37th, who had emerged from the second oasis driving the enemy before them at the point of the bayonet.

The quickfirers of the 6th dislodged detached groups of Arabs from clumps of olive and palm trees from which a desultory fire proceeded.

At 6, on the heights of the Mergheb, the garrison counter-attacked the enemy who, called towards the main body by signal fires, seemed uncertain what to do. The Italians succeeded in checking them while the engagement at Lebda was being decided.

In the interval the Bersaglieri, harassed by a desultory fire on their right had pushed through and reached the heights of Hammangi, driving the enemy from its position there after a brief but vigorous engagement, and had at once proceeded to entrench. The 37th was likewise in occupation of Lebda, while the third column had occupied the heights of the Red Hills completing the new line of defence. The force on the Mergheb had withdrawn within its lines, its object having been accomplished.

The action developed over a very large extent of ground in comparison with the force engaged. The Italians wished to secure their objective without loss of time, to preclude further reinforcements signalled for since the inception of the action reaching the Turks, and were satisfied with overcoming the resistance of the latter, avoiding the delay which would have

been necessary, given the mobility of the enemy, to turn a retreat of the enemy into a rout. Thus a good proportion of the Turco-Arabs were able to find their way south out of range of the Italian fire, while the Bersaglieri pushed through and occupied Mount Hammangi.

The action occupied a little over 1½ hours.

Towards the evening of May 2-3 the Arabs, who throughout the day had been hovering in the direction of Sliten, some 6 or 7 kilometres from the Italian outposts, accentuated the desultory firing which had been going on all day, and at 8 p.m. initiated an attack against the Italian trenches at Lebda and Hammangi, held by only a portion of the force who had occupied them in the morning.

The attack was not pushed home, and resolved itself into a demonstration in force to cover the massing of the Turco-Arabs, reinforced since the conclusion of the morning engagement, for an attack against the Red Hills on a line drawn between Hammangi and Mergheb, having for its object the breaking through the Italian line and cutting off their advanced position, captured earlier in the day and against which the first attack had been directed.

The Turks succeeded in surrounding three-fourths of the Italian advanced line, their attack reaching its maximum intensity at 10 p.m., but were repulsed by the infantry in defence of it, with whom was a mountain battery.

The artillery in position was unable to assist at this point, owing to the Italians themselves being within the zone of fire, but rendered useful service at various

other points, from which they drove back the enemy seeking to break through.

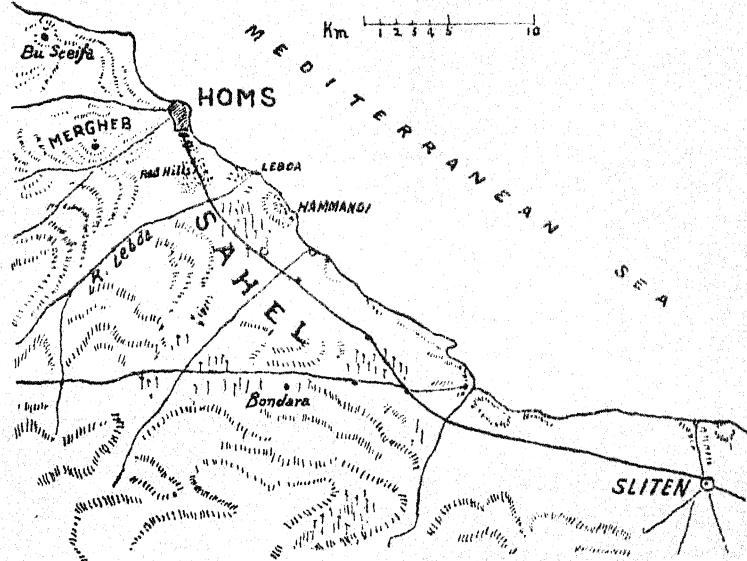
The Turks retired towards the south shortly after 10 p.m., leaving casualties on the field. Italian search-lights disclosed the main attack at its inception.

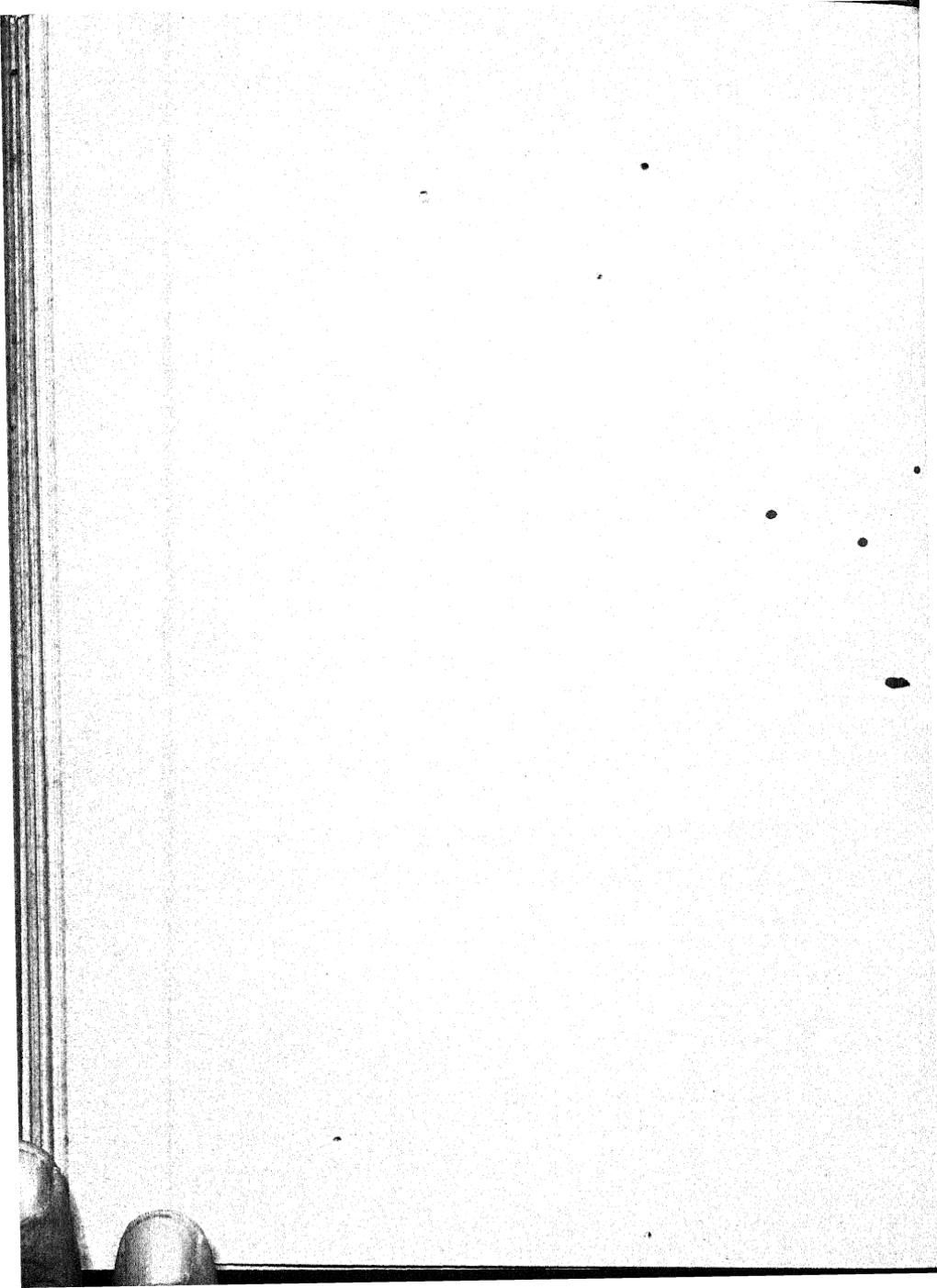
At 4 a.m. June 11-12 the Turks, after desultory isolated attacks on the Italian defences, unexpectedly attacked in force a redoubt on the Red Hills, occupied by a small detachment of the 89th Regiment under a subaltern, driving from it the Italians, who, with the loss of four men, cut their way through to the redoubt on their left, leaving the Turks in possession.

A general attack on the Italian position followed, initiated by shrapnel fire from a four-gun Turkish battery, silenced after a few innocuous rounds by the Italian artillery.

Shelled by the guns of the Italian fortifications, exposed to cross fire from the trenches, the Turks, checked everywhere else, were compelled to evacuate the conquered redoubt, but obstinately prolonged the engagement.

General Reisoli had meantime sent a battalion, chiefly Bersaglieri, to counter-attack the flank and rear of the enemy. Moving rapidly over rough ground, this force, unseen, succeeded in enveloping the enemy, whom they attacked simultaneously with a counter-attack delivered from the trenches, and defeated at 8.15 a.m. A portion was pursued and shelled by the batteries, while another was surrounded and annihilated. Near the Red Hills 421 dead were counted. The Italian losses were 2 officers and 29 men dead, 2 officers and 57 men wounded.





IX

DERNA

On November 24 a mixed Italian column, made up of soldiers and sailors, reconnoitred as far as the sources of the River Derna.

They were attacked by Bedouins, posted behind the crest of a hill dominating the road followed by the Italians.

It must be understood that the river cuts the Italian position at Derna into two and that, on account of the precipitous nature of its banks and the depth at which the bed of the river is below them, access from one side of the position to the other can only be effected by following the river down almost to the coast, into the town.

The attack was an insistent one, and with their usual tactics the Bedouins rapidly prolonged their left in an attempt to envelop the Italians to cut them off from Derna.

The Italians retired in echelon before the fire of the Bedouins, who thereupon initiated an advance which became stronger and more menacing at every step.

It became imperative to stop it with the bayonets ; a series of charges commenced, and the action over difficult ground became necessarily scattered.

The Bedouins were ever increasing in numbers and,

profiting by their knowledge of the ground, were able to move mostly under cover and in safety.

The sailors fought well but without cohesion, and let themselves be drawn into more and more scattered groups.

The action was losing all semblance of discipline, control was difficult to retain and the situation was becoming critical, especially in view of the approaching night.

Suddenly, on the left of the Italians, a battalion of Alpini made its appearance on the crest of a precipice. This battalion had been in reserve on the other side of the river on the extreme left of the reconnaissance, and had marched, in fact climbed and dropped, to the firing line. It was an extremely difficult way, and none but a mountain battalion could have managed it.

Under cover of their fire the column was able to extricate itself. The Alpini carried the wounded. Some groups of Italians, however, had got out of touch and were necessarily left behind. Their bodies were found at the bottom of the valley the following day, and buried.

The Turco-Arabs attacked the Italian trenches before Derna on the morning of December 1. They made their appearance not further than 400 metres from the Italian position east of the river.

The line of the Italian defence ran astride of the river, along the edge of rocky tableland dominated by hills. Immediately in front was a gradual rise for about 400 metres, terminating in a sudden precipitous descent into a ravine joining the bed of the River Derna.

The Turco-Arab attack was not pressed home, and was apparently nothing more than a demonstration in force, made in the hope of drawing to the threatened point the whole of the Italian reserve, leaving the western half of the Italian position depleted, if not altogether undefended.

The demonstration however failed in its object, and after about an hour's perfectly innocuous rifle-fire against the Italian trenches, ceased.

A mountain battery advanced to follow with its fire the retiring Turks, and took up a position on a small hill south-east of the town, where the Piedmont redoubt was subsequently erected.

From this position were seen masses of Bedouins moving to the western side of the defences under cover and invisible from the trenches. Moving through the intervening ravines, they had accomplished a rapid change across the river from one position to the other. The guns came into action against their flank at about 2,500 metres and enfiladed them with considerable effect. They could not, on account of the numbers crowded within a necessarily confined space, get rapidly out of the zone of fire, and suffered heavy losses.

Their withdrawal took some time and was effected amidst confusion and in a cloud of dust.

Early in the morning of December 27 the canal bringing drinkable water into Derna was found dry, the aqueduct having evidently been broken.

Two kilometres from the town was a natural reservoir forming the starting-point of the canal, and a force was sent there to reconnoitre and repair the damage.

This force was divided into three columns moving, one on the tableland to the right, the second on the tableland to the left, and the third along the river itself.

The march was a difficult one, and it was 11 a.m. before the covering troops were in position a kilometre and a half ahead of the breakage, which the engineers proceeded to repair.

The scouts of the right column sighted the enemy in a neighbouring valley, and the Mountain Battery with the column came into action against it. It proved to be the rear-guard of a column, the main body of which was at the time advancing against the Italians under cover and invisible.

Five minutes afterwards some shrapnel passed high over the Italian battery. It was the Turkish Artillery coming into action, for the first time from an excellent position well masked behind a ridge.

The Italians fired against the flashes and for a time silenced the Turkish battery, which was then divided, the sections taking up fresh position to come into action against the Italian Infantry, who had deployed in skirmishing order.

A few hundred metres off the first line of Bedouin riflemen had by this made its appearance, thin at first but rapidly increasing in strength as reinforcements were pushed forward. They advanced impetuously with tactics entirely their own, each man lying down, jumping up, firing and advancing on his own account, then disappearing again—an advance which can be best described as a series of jumps, sudden and as if moved by invisible springs.

The Bedouins, coming closer, detached a small body to fire solely against the Italian Battery which had so

far maintained its fire with guns more and more depressed. The shrapnel cut lanes through the Bedouins, but did not check them, some of them several times reaching the guns, which had again and again to retire carried by the gunners and coming into action at each halt.

A fight at close quarters with carbines and bayonets eventuated each time prior to the withdrawal of the guns.

In the meantime the usual outflanking movement developed on the right of the Italians, carried out by the Turco-Arabs at the double with extreme rapidity in good formation.

The battalion in reserve was sent against them and, with the bayonet, was upon the Turco-Arabs almost before they were aware of it, breaking and driving them back.

Reinforced they re-formed under cover and, this time in superior strength, once more renewed the movement. Troops were sent over from the left to the threatened flank, an Alpini battalion this time counter-attacking the extreme left of the enemy with the bayonet and driving them back in confusion.

The Alpini lost some officers in the assault but the battalion carried all before it. The right of the Italians was free, and the Turks, discouraged, initiated a retirement, while the Italians themselves, not strong enough to pursue, fell back on their position.

Here again the deceitful nature of the ground caused a repetition of the experience of November 24, some of the Italian units, in falling back, losing their way and coming again under the enemy's fire.

The section of quickfirers of the 26th Infantry found

itself involved in a labyrinth of tracks without outlet, on the edge of precipices and bumped against a detachment of the enemy, who attacked them. Seeing no way out, the Italians whipped the mules carrying the guns over the cliff into the precipice at the bottom, where the guns were recovered the following day, and then extricated themselves.

A portion of the column retiring on the left attacked by the Turco-Arabs had to fight its way through with the bayonet.

The Turkish attack was decided upon only when their scouts reported the presence of the Italian force.

The Turks realised fully the advantage which the nature of the ground and their superior strength afforded them over the enemy. The latter had to accept battle under difficult conditions, and scattered over difficult ground, which rendered their concentration and organised action almost impossible.

At dawn of January 17 the first squad of the force covering the outworks in progress at the fortifications had hardly got beyond the entanglements when they were attacked with hand grenades by a Turkish force who had cleverly crept up in the darkness, unobserved by the Italian sentries. No one was hit and the confusion on which the Turks had counted did not eventuate.

They had reckoned that a sudden and unexpected attack on troops marching in close order would leave them no option but to retire in confusion, when it would have been easy to follow them into the fortifications, the defenders of which, unable to distinguish the enemy in the uncertain light, would hesitate to fire.

The first portion of the Turkish force once within

the defences, the way for the main body and Bedouin masses behind it would have been easy. The officer in charge of the attacked squad, however, with great presence of mind, gave the order to charge with bayonets, and the Turks believing the force larger than was actually the case hardly waited for this to be carried out, dispersing amongst the rocks.

The whole of the Italian defences had by this been manned, and the enemy's retreat was followed with a fire of some intensity.

On the left of the Italians, about a kilometre east of the redoubt Piedmont, on the edge of a ravine, jutted out a spur on which were some ruins which had been used as a day observation post by the Italians.

When day broke, the Turks were found entrenched upon it, their front upon the left flank of the Italians, and running at right angles to the precipice. From this position they effectually harassed the left of the enemy.

A battalion of Alpini advanced out of the trenches, replying to the Turkish fire. The usual enveloping movement was, in the meantime, eventuating on the right.

The Turks, according to their usual custom, made use of the edges of ravines as trenches from which to protect, under cover, the movements of their main body moving at the bottom and over tracks running along the sides to the Alpini's right flank which they had begun to harass, forcing the battalion to repeated changes of front.

Their chief object was to crush by superior force the advance of the Italians, cut off their retreat and at the same time preclude either reinforcement or

fire assistance from the redoubts. The Alpini finally freed their right by bayonet attacks.

A small ravine cutting the edge of the Turkish position at the ruins made it possible for Italian reinforcements to reach its flank unseen, under cover of a frontal attack by the Alpini.

The Turks, taken entirely by surprise, evacuated the position and retired towards the east into country which made pursuit impossible.

The same morning, on the western side of Derna a strong Turkish force had massed, evidently awaiting the result of the attack on the east, to come into action. When this attack was abandoned this force slowly retired under the fire of the Italian Artillery.

The Turkish battery had come into action but only half-heartedly and was quickly silenced.

From a Turkish prisoner it was ascertained that the number of grenades with which the Arabs had been furnished had been forty, but for some reason only three were thrown.

In the early part of the evening of February 11-12 the Turks, under cover of darkness, advanced in two columns against the Italian position at Derna: one column of about 500 men to the right, the other consisting of about 1,000 Bedouins, with a stiffening of Turkish Regulars, the whole under the command of Turkish officers, to the left of the River Derna.

The whole of the country is difficult in the extreme, without roads, and crossed by a series of tracks, for the most part known to the natives only, running on the edges of precipices.

Two kilometres or thereabouts from the Italian posi-

tion, on high ground west of the river, is a marabout, or tomb, of a holy man. On reaching this point the Turkish force, to the left of the river, divided into three, making respectively for the redoubt Lombardia (in course of construction in an advanced position 3 kilometres south of Derna, analogous to that of the redoubt Piedmont on the right of the river, the redoubt Piedmont itself, and, beyond it, the extreme left of the Italian trenches east towards the sea.

This force took every advantage of the sinuosities of the ground and practically crawled undisturbed to the Italian position.

At 9 p.m. the centre column attacked the redoubt Piedmont, held by the 5th Company of the 26th and forming the key to the left of the Italian defence, but were repulsed.

The attack was repeated with great bravery, but the barbed wire entanglements and powerful searchlights of the Italian position rendered the task an extremely difficult one.

A battery of Field Artillery and a battalion of Alpini Ivrea having come to the support of the force in the trenches, the Turks were again hopelessly driven back notwithstanding their bravery and the determined nature of their attack.

By the sea front, lower down, the column on the right, who had attempted to turn the flank of the position, were repulsed by a battalion of the 15th Infantry and two companies of sailors.

The action, isolated and purely local at both points, had clearly something behind it.

The Italians redoubled their vigilance during the two hours of silence that followed the repulse of the Turks.

The searchlight at the observation post behind the redoubt Lombardia finally discovered the enemy on its front massing for the main attack.

The ground in front of the redoubts rises to the hills opposite ; its western zone, however, is of the major importance, as the redoubt Lombardia dominates the only road to the interior over which a column of any strength can move.

At 10.30 began an engagement at this point which lasted the whole night. The burden of it, at one end, fell upon the 51st Company Alpini (Edolo), 146 men garrisoning the incomplete redoubt ; reinforced later by the whole of the battalion.

The redoubt in question was one kilometre in advance of the general line of Italian defences and was, as has been said, in course of construction. On completion it was intended to be garrisoned by two infantry companies and four guns. The wall was up 1·20 metres, the parapet and emplacements were wanting, but a temporary parapet of bags of sand had been built.

Within was a chaos of material. 50 metres from the wall an entanglement of barbed wire 10 metres wide had been made. Beyond it were three mines.

The redoubt was connected by two unfinished lateral walls with two small towers in course of construction, about 150 metres off. Of the towers, the one on the right alone was above its foundation and had been topped up with sacks of earth to afford shelter to sixteen men of the Alpini under an officer who had been detached for its protection. The connecting walls were likewise topped with sacks of earth.

At 10.30 p.m. both tower and redoubt were attacked,

the alarm being given by the dogs chained to the entanglements.

Of the Arabs a portion had reached the entanglements of the redoubt, another had surrounded the small tower, which they were trying to scale, endeavouring to tear down the bags topping the walls.

The Alpini held them off until, reduced to ten, they ran short of ammunition. Carrying the wounded, they then cut their way with bayonets through the Arabs, who were using rifle butts and sticks, firing being impossible at such close quarters.

The Alpini won through, helped by the fact that the Arabs did not so much want to kill them as to make use of them to find the narrow way through the entanglements.

The defenders of the redoubt, seeing the situation, had almost ceased their fire for fear of hitting their own men. The Arabs, some dozens of Bedouins who had followed the Alpini into the clear space within the entanglement, profited by this to come right up to the parapet. Some actually put their rifles into the openings between the sand bags and fired into the redoubt. Others used their rifle barrels as levers to displace the sacks of earth on the parapet. In some cases they actually tore the bayonets from the rifles of the Italians in their endeavour to wrest the rifles from the men's hands.

In the morning, the hands of many of the dead found below the walls of the redoubt were found blistered by the heat of the rifle barrels they had caught hold of in the fight.

The attack paused, to be renewed almost immediately, but the Turco-Arabs, though they fought with absolute

recklessness, seemed unable to penetrate the defence beyond the unfinished lateral walls of which they were in possession.

The Italians were reinforced just as their ammunition failed.

The two companies who, bringing with them an ammunition column, had come from the main defences through the fire of both sides, to the relief of the redoubt, quickly disposed of the attack upon it; but the enemy stubbornly remained in occupation of the small tower and of the unfinished walls, which ran out from the main tower held by the Italians, and had to be dislodged.

The 50th Company took the left, the 52nd the right.

A searchlight on an observation post at the back of the position showed the left wall strongly occupied. The 50th charged it and, with a loss of one dead and six wounded, dislodged the Arabs, who retired and were lost in the darkness.

The ammunition column had, in the meantime, slipped into the redoubt between the two companies and distributed the ammunition to the 51st.

The entanglements protecting the redoubt on the right were between the 52nd and the wall held by the enemy, and they were also in the range of fire of the main body of the Turkish force who had attacked the centre of the Italian redoubt.

The 52nd lay down and opened fire in the dark, without however doing the enemy any damage. The company then crossed the clear space within the entanglements and, with some difficulty, owing to the darkness, found their way into the redoubt.

From the small tower evacuated by the Italians one

Arab assault followed another, to be driven back. After each repulse the Arabs fell back to the small tower and re-formed. A few minutes after the attack was renewed.

On the other hand the Italian defence had so far checked but not defeated the enemy.

Unable to carry the position by weight of numbers, and insensible to wounds, the Arabs attempted demolishing the entanglements. The mines were thereupon fired. Two went off, the third failed. The entanglements were cleared, though the rifle-fire of the main Turkish body was renewed vigorously.

At this stage the quickfirers' section of the Regiment, flaving marched in the darkness by the flashes of the rifles, arrived, and the guns were lifted on to the edge of the wall, which, however, in its unfinished state, was not wide enough to take their rests.

Two Alpinis sat down beneath the wall with their backs against it and formed a support for the guns, which then came into action, turning the tide of battle and compelling the Arabs to retire, followed by the fire of the Italians.

The 50th Company were now able to enter the redoubt, and the 51st Company, who had borne the brunt of the action from the commencement, lay down to rest.

Their casualties were 3 dead, 20 wounded.

130 dead Arabs found within 100 metres of the Fort were buried by the Italians.

At 2 a.m. Turkish Regulars developed a further attack on the extreme left of the position, close to Derna, but the action was not at any time serious.

At 3 a.m. the whole of the Turco-Arabs had retired.

The Turks appear to have had some 5,000 men available, of whom 500 were Regulars. Their plan had been to make a demonstration west of the river, to provoke a concentration of Italian troops there, while nearly half their force operated east of the river against the redoubt Lombardia with the intention of taking it and, reinforced by the balance of the force, move to Derna in the morning.

The stubborn resistance of the Italians, as well as their vigilance, defeated the Turkish plan.

In the morning some companies of infantry went out with mountain artillery against an enemy's column, retiring slowly with a convoy of dead, dispersing it.

On the evening of February 11-12, during the attack against the Lombardia redoubt, another was developing farther back against the redoubt Calabria which dominates a crossing of precipices on the extreme right of the Italian defence line. The enemy were seen massing in a valley beyond it while their fire-action developed against the Lombardia, and were fired at.

The Turco-Arabs immediately attacked, bravely climbing the slopes of the precipices to get at the entanglements. They were picked out by the searchlight at the post of observation behind the redoubts.

The section of mountain artillery in the Lombardia came into action against them, firing at zero and doing considerable execution, but with little effect as far as checking the attack was concerned, as for every man that fell dozens took his place.

Nothing could keep them back, and they crowded round the entanglements careless of danger, seeking a way through.

One of the Italian watchdogs tied to the entanglements was freed by some Bedouins and, as they hoped, actually indicated the way through, but at this point the mines on the outer margin of the entanglements were fired and practically put an end to the attack at 4 a.m.

At 7 a.m. on March 3 a battalion of the 35th sent to cover working parties constructing field works round the Lombardia fort was suddenly attacked at close range by Turco-Arabs occupying an entrenched position, about one kilometre to the Italian front, which they had taken up, unobserved during the night.

The 35th was at the time in the open, moving forward towards the position occupied by them on the previous day. Their scouts did not at first realise that the enemy was in force, and looked upon the attack as one of their regular daily skirmishes against isolated groups acting independently.

Mountain artillery came into action from the redoubt, and the Infantry continued to advance towards the position it intended to occupy, without troubling to reply to the fire.

The folds of the ground and the ravines beyond the tableland, however, afforded cover to a very strong Turkish force on a front extending over four kilometres.

It had been the Turkish intention to surprise the protecting Italian force as it emerged from the defences, drive it back and, profiting by the confusion, enter the fortifications in its wake, under cover of a simultaneous general attack on the Italian position. But the plan, similar to that of January 17, though on a

larger scale, once more failed. The Italians, by sheer good luck, came out of the fortifications much earlier than usual, and the Turks, who did not expect it, were neither close enough nor ready.

The attack at 11 a.m. so developed in intensity that the Officer Commanding the Italian Battalion, who so far had acted chiefly on the defensive, decided to bring up his local reserves.

What surprised the Italians most was the well-regulated fire. The reason of it was soon to be made apparent by the number of Turkish Regulars who disclosed their position, and while in former actions the decisive ranges were most dangerous, in this the most effective fire came from long ranges—sure evidence that the men behind the rifles were disciplined and knew how to shoot.

Several officers and soldiers on the Italian side fell under long-range fire.

The ravines on the right of the Italian line afforded the Turkish forces ample cover and good natural positions, while the Italians had the disadvantage of being in the open.

Every change of position necessitated by the development of the action was carried out by the Turkish forces under cover, a thin screen of skirmishers crowning the protecting ridges.

The action was assuming unexpected proportions and a grave character, and was developing almost to the dimensions of a battle.

General Cappello, at this stage, took charge, and sent from Derna a second battalion of the 35th and one of the 26th as well as a battalion of Alpini, and a mountain battery, keeping a strong reserve in hand

ready to take the offensive when the proper time arrived.

The 2nd Battalion of the 35th reinforced the firing line and drew the fire of the enemy, while the battalion first engaged, manœuvring under cover, endeavoured to turn their left. But the Turks saw through the tactics of the Italians, and gradually extended their front so that the battalion when it emerged found itself engaged, not against the flank but the front of the enemy, and became instead the right wing of the Italian line, beyond which the Turkish front had extended ready to outflank the Italian right.

This was checked by the coming into action of the remainder of the Italian force.

The fire of the Italians was well aimed and controlled, units coming into action as they arrived on the field, their movements sure and well executed, discipline excellent, and losses were inflicted by them on the enemy at the cost of comparatively few casualties.

After three-quarters of an hour the Turkish forces were driven back at the point of the bayonet from one position to another, fighting stubbornly, until beyond and to the south of the Italian defences the Turks reformed and entrenched under fire, holding the Italians in check.

Up to midday the fighting continued in a somewhat desultory fashion, neither party gaining any advantage, and partook of the nature of a series of disconnected actions. But after midday the Turkish fire intensified, and under cover of it they effected a successful flank march, and got round to the left of the Italians, where they developed a vigorous fire action.

At 1.30 the Italian line had assumed a semicircular front of about three kilometres.

The Turkish Regulars were in action in extended order, in lines at wide intervals well adapted to the formation of the ground. They were gaining ground, despite the efforts of the Italians to check their advance. A section of a mountain battery was about to come into action where the fight was warmest, when suddenly a Turkish battery opened fire upon it and with a few rounds of shrapnel put the whole of its personnel out of action.

The section was in danger of falling into the hands of the enemy, when General Cappello sent to its rescue one of the battalions of the 35th, who, advancing in perfect order, surprised the Turkish Regulars, who had moved into the open to take the guns, causing them heavy losses, first with its fire, then with the bayonet.

The Turkish Regulars for some time held their ground well, improvising trenches with their dead, behind whom they made a good stand.

Shock tactics, however, carried the day, and the bayonet attack disposed of them.

The section was recovered and the enemy broken up and forced to retire to a position 500 metres farther back, occupied by them at an earlier stage of the action, and consisting of a series of trenches from which the Turks with great pluck resumed their fire against the Italians, who, halting, replied with good effect.

It is reckoned that by this time (2 p.m.) no less than 2,500 Turks and 5,000 Bedouins were engaged.

The 26th and 35th had meantime succeeded by bayonet counter-attacks in completely breaking down the attempted outflanking of the position on the right, driving back the enemy and, by a well-sustained fire,

preventing their advance out of the ravine where they had taken cover.

But the Italian line was too extensive for the number of troops available, and the Turks, profiting by this, concentrated their efforts against the centre, launching against it a strong column of Bedouins who, by this time, had emerged from the ravine opposite it and resolutely advanced under cover of a very strong Turkish fire directed particularly against the gunners of the Mountain Battery which had reinforced the centre of the Italian line and silenced the Turkish battery after dismounting two of its guns.

This Mountain Battery, to obtain a better target, had taken up a risky position beyond the Italian general line. Its gunners were decimated and, of all the officers, only one remained.

Two of the pieces were worked by one man, a corporal who, after firing 42 rounds, retired before the on-coming Bedouins, after removing the breech-blocks of the guns.

Captain D'Angelo, commanding the battery, had been wounded, and after emptying his revolver at the enemy who had reached him was knifed on the guns.

A company of the 31st arrived in the nick of time and charged the Bedouins then on the guns, driving them back at the point of the bayonet. The latter, however, retired, but to crowd again to the attack in increased numbers.

They were unable, however, to break through the 31st and get to the guns.

Some Alpini supervened and took up the guns on their shoulders, the limbers were dragged back by the 31st and the battery successfully withdrawn within the Italian lines, fighting every inch of the way.

The Italians suffered heavily, the captain commanding the relief company being cut off from his command, surrounded and killed by the Bedouins, whom he held off with a rifle taken from a dead soldier till his ammunition had been exhausted.

At 2.30 the Italian Commander-in-chief at Derna, General Trombi, took charge, and massing battalions of the 22nd, 7th and 40th in reserve at the Lombardia redoubt, to provide for eventualities, pushed a strong counter-attack in the direction of the caravan road on the west of Derna, forcing the flank of the enemy and threatening its retreat on that side.

The operation was entrusted to a column composed of a battalion of Alpini in the centre, a portion of another battalion on the right and a battalion of Fusiliers on the left, and decided the day in favour of the Italians.

The column advanced in a wedge formation, the wings ready to deploy, penetrating two kilometres into the enemy's position.

The 35th simultaneously repeated its bayonet attack against the fanatic enemy, caring nothing for death and offering the most desperate resistance.

The shock was severe and bravery conspicuous on both sides. The Turks finally gave way and retreated, firing as they went.

At 3 the Turks had found once more a favourable position on the south side of the torrent, and their fire increased in volume. General Trombi sent into action a battalion of the 40th, another battalion of Alpini, and the 22nd. These troops advanced for some distance along the bed of the torrent before climbing up its southern bank.

They were necessarily without artillery, but their

advance was covered by the fire of the artillery of the Piedmont Fort, on the extreme left or eastern side of the Italian defences.

The Alpini on coming out of the bed of the torrent charged. The enemy seemed to stand to await the shock and fired an effective volley into the advancing Alpini, but failed to stop them.

The first lines of Bedouins as the Alpini came nearer, after a moment's hesitation, broke and fled.

The Turkish Regulars, farther back, more disciplined, continued their fire above the heads of the Bedouins against the Alpini, who were absolutely without cover.

The Mountain Battery, firing shrapnel, effectively assisted their advance over the rise, now covered with dead.

At last they got to the Turkish Regulars. The Turkish officer at their head shouted something to the advancing force and went down, and with him the major part of his command, literally swept off their feet by the grey avalanche of men; only a few of the Turks at this point succeeded in getting away.

General Cappello co-operated by initiating a vigorous forward movement against the enemy's right flank, compelling him to definitely evacuate his position. Towards 4 o'clock the Italians were masters of the whole of the positions, successively occupied by the Turks during the day and which they had defended so strongly and determinedly that it led to frequent close-quarters fighting.

The Italians, not in sufficient strength to take up a pursuit, followed the retreat of the Turks with artillery fire and at 4.30 retired on their defences under a de-

sultory fire from Arab screens masking the retreat of the main body of the Turkish force, a stray shot killing an officer.

The fight had lasted 11 hours. The artillery remained in action till 6.30 p.m. firing at isolated groups.

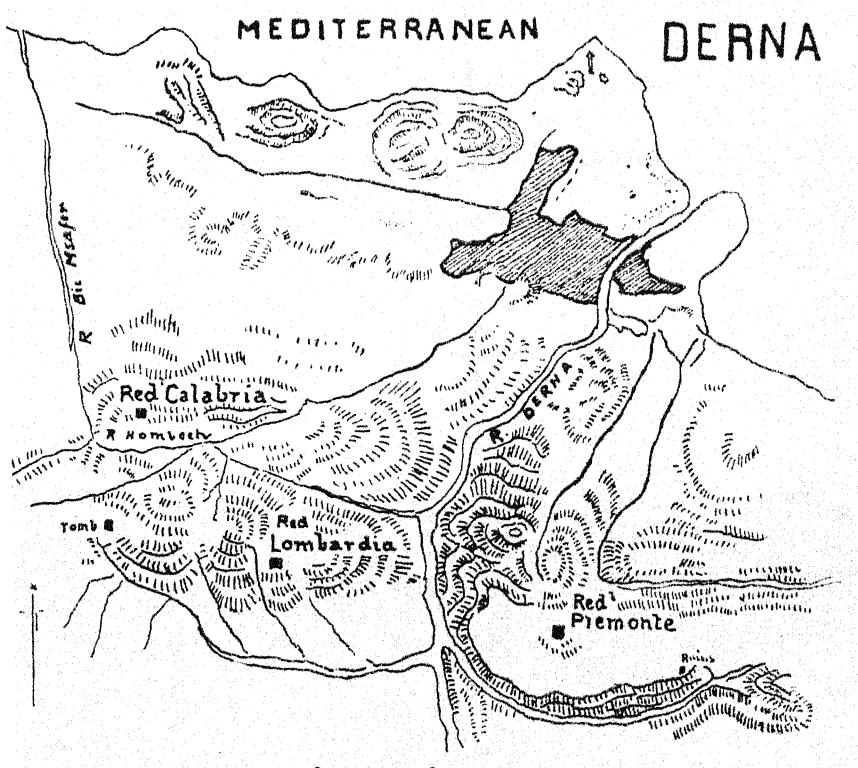
While the Turco-Arabs were being driven from one position to another, Enver Bey with two battalions of mixed Turkish Regulars and Arabs descended from the hill from which he had been watching the progress of the battle and endeavoured to stem the retreat by turning the Italian flank. For a moment the Turkish Officer Commanding and his Staff found themselves within the range of a gun of one of the Italian mountain batteries, supporting the bayonet attack, and a shrapnel fired at the group gravely wounded Enver Bey, who was immediately taken to the rear followed by the staff.

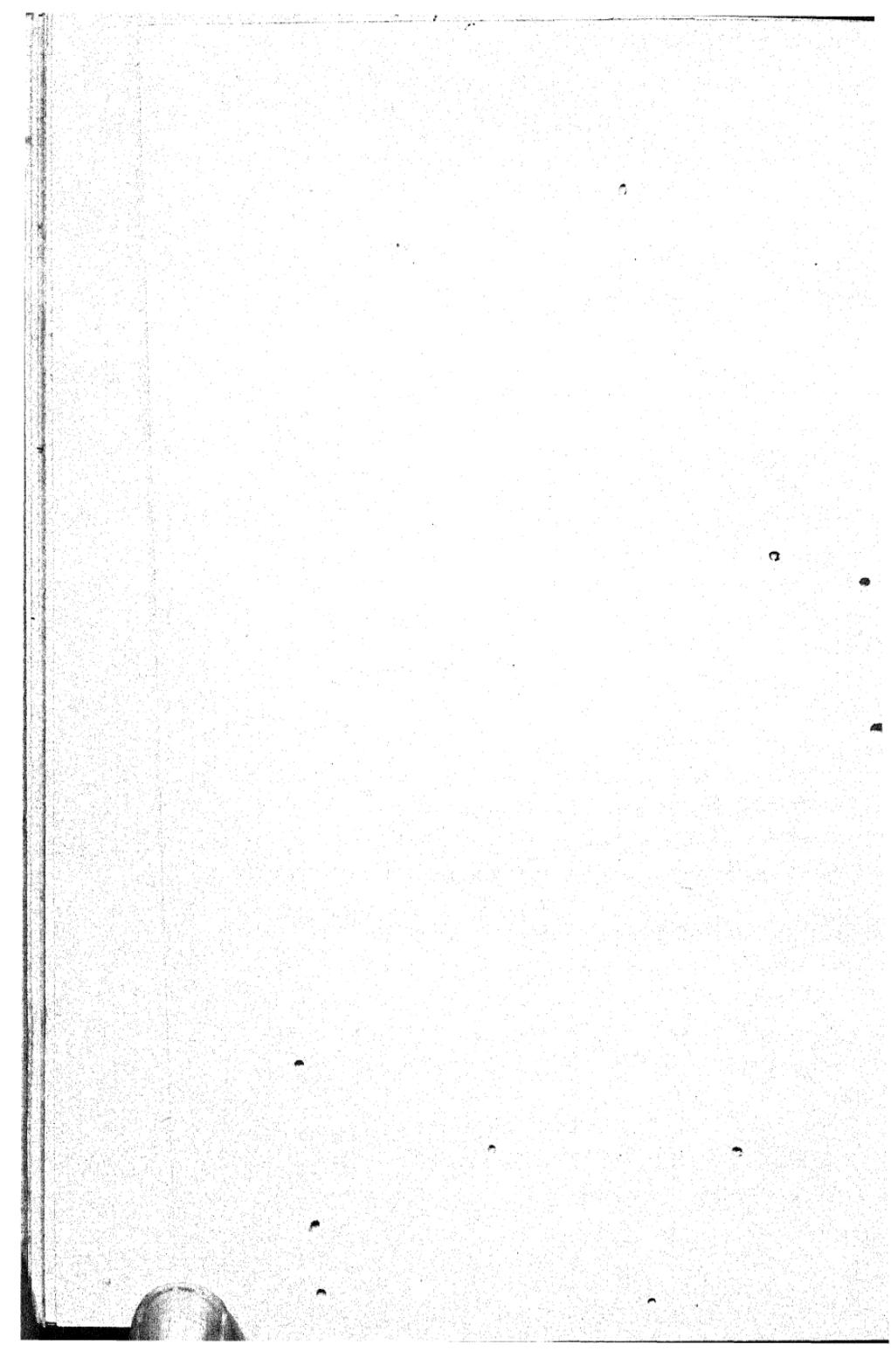
It was reported that Enver Bey died of gangrene supervening on this wound on April 23.

An Italian infantry company had the whole of its officers shot during the assault of the Turkish trenches. The Turks almost surrounded it, counter-attacking with great vigour, but were themselves decimated by the troops who came to the assistance of the Italian company. Under an incessant fire of both artillery and infantry they ultimately abandoned the field.

The divisional command sent ten battalions only into the field, to avoid depriving the east front of the town defences of its garrison.

The action was essentially an infantry action, the Italians having an exceptionally small number of guns available and these mountain guns and quickfirers only.





X

BENGASI

Bengasi is protected by a line of small forts or redoubts running north-east to south-west and known respectively as "Grande," "Foyat," and "Roma," and, farther back, Berka. The Foyat is on the north-eastern margin of a small oasis.

In anticipation of an attack by a large Turkish force seen massing in the neighbourhood of Bengasi, a reconnaissance in force was effected by the Italians, without hindrance, on March 7, 1912, to ascertain its strength and disposition.

On the night of the 9th to 10th the Arabs had cut and taken away between 300 and 400 metres of telegraph and telephone wires connecting the redoubts, Foyats and Grande, as well as a quantity of posts.

It was thought that the latter had been removed for fuel, of which the Arabs were badly in need.

The service was reinstated, and again interrupted the following night. It was then made clear to the Italians that it was not a case of theft but a deliberate intention to isolate the redoubts preparatory to an action.

On the night of the 11th to 12th the Italians sent a company of the 57th to take up a position, roughly, in a line running parallel to the Italian defences along

the telephone line from the eastern margin of the Foyat oasis to the Grande.

Their orders were not to be drawn from the locality, and to avoid coming either under a cross fire or under the fire of the artillery of the two redoubts. The searchlight of the redoubt Roma had the task of lighting up the ground watched.

The Arabs did not enter this zone of light but made a long round, coming within the zone lighted from the Grande, whose fire dispersed them.

At this point the light of the Roma failed, and a group of some 50 Arabs profited by this to get behind the Italian company for the purpose of drawing water from the wells in the locality, retiring after accomplishing this without molestation on the part of the Italians, who thought it inadvisable to attack in the dark a force of which they knew nothing.

The Arabs, in retiring with the water, cut again the telephone communications.

At daylight the Italian company was about to go in when they saw some 800 Bedouins coming out of the oasis of the Two Palms, about 700 metres north-east of the Foyat. This oasis is a close bit of country, forming an irregular octagon about 300 metres in depth and a little less in width, rich in vegetation and surmounted by Two Palms (the only ones) at its northern end.

It had been sought by the Arabs as a base from which to harass the Italian fortifications, and the latter had, during a reconnaissance some time previously, pulled down nearly all boundary walls within and around it to diminish its value to the enemy.

The Italian company opened fire on the Bedouins,

who were making towards the "Foyat." Surprised, they halted and, with hardly a show of fight, drew back into the oasis followed by the fire of the two redoubts.

The Italian company then returned to barracks.

Between 6 a.m. and 8 a.m. long lines of Turco-Arabs appeared beyond Scetuam, 5½ to 6 kilometres to the south-east of the oasis.

The aeroplanes sent in reconnaissance reported the Turkish force in strength over 6,000.

At 6.30 a.m. a Turkish battery of six guns brought up during the night, took up a position about three kilometres north-east of Scetuam and opened fire against the Foyat redoubt.

It was out of range of its target and its fire fell considerably short. It looked as if its coming into action had been more for moral effect than in expectation to do damage. It is possible, however, that the battery had come into action at a stated time with the intention of co-operating with a pre-arranged surprise attack of the Bedouins massed within the oasis, nullified earlier in the day by the unexpected appearance of the company of the 57th.

The Italian Field Artillery at the Foyat replied without effect to the Turkish battery until the 149-mm. guns of the Berka came into action and silenced it.

From traces subsequently found in the dry bed of the river behind its position, it was withdrawn and remained there under cover.

Some weeks after some Arabs reported that the Turkish guns ceased to fire owing to the fact that two Italian shells burst in the middle of the battery and killed 2 officers and 10 artillerymen, leaving the battery without skilled gunners. It may be re-

marked that the Italians could not see the Turkish battery but aimed at the puffs of smoke.

At 7.30 a.m. heavy columns of Turco-Arabs covering a front of about ten kilometres were seen advancing towards the Italian defences. As they neared their objective they deployed, but, in doing so, lost all semblance of order or cohesion. A notable exception to this was apparent in the centre of the advance, where the guns had been and where Turkish Regulars halted and remained steady in lines of columns out of range of the Italian Field Artillery.

An attempt was made by the Turco-Arabs to attack the left flank of the Italians towards Bengasi, but the quickfirers of the Italian Infantry prevented it.

At 8.30 a.m. that portion of the Turco-Arab forces who had deployed for attack and kept up some desultory firing gave indications of retirement. It was evident that some concerted scheme of action had failed.

At 9 a.m. the central columns of Turkish Regulars, which had halted without deploying, moved off in good order to the rear. The Turco-Arabs massed at various points, out of reach of Italian Infantry but followed by the heavy guns.

A fresh column of infantry followed by cavalry made its appearance on the right towards the south, and was dispersed by the guns of the redoubt Roma.

At 10 a.m. only isolated men were in sight.

The attack seemed to have degenerated into a desultory demonstration in force through disappearance of organisation following the surprise of the Bedouins in the early morning and, what is more extraordinary, in view of the extreme mobility of the Turco-Arabs,

the failure of communication between the various columns of the Turkish force.

The Bedouins remained within the Oasis of the Two Palms, with an advanced post at the Furnaces some two hundred metres nearer the Italian position, and additional forces were taking shelter there, to await darkness to retire in safety.

General Briccola commanding the Division at Bengasi thereupon decided on a counter-attack, with the primary object of dislodging them.

The force detached by the Italian Officer Commanding consisted of 7 battalions of Infantry, 3 Mountain Batteries and 2 batteries of Field Artillery, as follows :

One Regiment made up of units of the 7th Brigade : i.e. 2 battalions 79th, 1 battalion 57th with the Field Artillery, to form between Grande and the Red House, south of it. Its objective was the northern margin of the Two Palms.

One regiment made up of units of the 4th Brigade : i.e. 2 battalions of the 4th, 1 battalion of the 63rd with 2 Mountain Batteries, on the right of the above between the Red House and the Foyat. Objective, south margin of the Oasis of Two Palms.

One battalion from the 7th Brigade (57th), with 1 Mountain Battery in general reserve to be substituted after absorption within the firing line by 1 battalion of the 6th and to remain at the disposal of the Officer Commanding at the Red House.

Three squadrons of cavalry were massed between the Berka and Roma to await orders.

The action, which lasted 2½ hours, was notable for its conception, co-operation amongst the three arms and the various units, fire discipline, resolute bayonet

assaults and shock tactics, and for the rapidity and efficacy of its various phases.

The troops to whom the task was entrusted were fully equal to it, the numbers having been carefully calculated upon the basis of the force the reconnaissance of the 7th and the aeroplane had shown to be at the disposal of the enemy, plus a liberal margin.

The proportion of the various arms was likewise on a liberal scale as far as artillery was concerned, in view of the artillery of the Italian defences before which the action developed being available to wear down the enemy's resistance.

This artillery was able, not only to sustain the infantry but to cover the advance of the artillery of the column and reduce its infantry escorts by enabling it at the inception of the action to remain farther back than would otherwise have been the case.

The short duration of the action was wholly due to the rapid yet implicit execution of the orders received by the Italians.

The cavalry found the enemy, drew its fire and retired to the flanks of the advancing force, protecting them. At the proper time it took up a dangerous pursuit with good results.

The artillery opened the way for the infantry whose advance it supported, ably co-operated with the turning of the flanks of the enemy's position, enfiladed and threw him into disorder, facilitating the bayonet charges which followed the advance, and ultimately with its fire turned a retreat into a rout, facilitating the work of the pursuing cavalry.

This co-operation was one of the most potent factors of a successful fight; without it, and without the

highest discipline, it would not have been possible for some 3,000 infantry to maintain its formation and to fall in perfect order upon the enemy, after traversing so much open ground with a large front under steady fire.

The maximum number of cartridges fired by any one of the Italian soldiers was 47—clear evidence of good fire discipline and that no ammunition had been wasted.

The 149-mm. guns and the guns of the Foyat, as well as the mountain battery prepared for the advance of the Italians by beating with their fire the Oasis of the Two Palms as well as the reverse of it precluding the evacuation of the oasis and retreat of the Bedouins as well as preventing any attempted reinforcements.

At 11.30 a.m. the mobile column formed up the centre, occupying as nearly as possible the position occupied the night previously by the infantry company.

The 4th and 63rd on the right had the field artillery behind them.

The 57th and the 79th on the left had the mountain battery less one battery with the General Reserve in their rear.

The cavalry had massed as directed under cover, while a dismounted squadron of Arab horsemen recently recruited by the Italians were held on the left of the line.

In the centre, and in rear of the line, near the well where the Arabs had got their water the night before, was the battalion of the 57th forming the General Reserve.

The extreme right of the force rested on the Foyat, the left on the Grande.

A quarter of an hour later, all the redoubts opened

fire—the Foyat and Grande concentrating theirs on the Oasis of the Two Palms, while the 149-mm. guns fired beyond it at masses of the enemy, indicating an intention to come to the reinforcement of the Bedouins within.

The Turco-Arabs, driven back by the artillery, attempted to re-form in a valley beyond the oasis, and were followed there by the artillery fire.

The second phase of the action was initiated at 11.45 a.m. by the advance of the Italian Infantry in extended order by rushes over stony ground, in perfect order, though they were absolutely devoid of cover.

Each regiment had two battalions in the firing line, one in support. The advance posts of the Bedouins were quickly driven in.

The first battalion of the 79th directed the attack against a smaller oasis at the northern extremity of the larger one, where the two palms, by this cut down by the artillery fire, had been.

It seemed almost an impossibility for any force to have remained within the oasis under the artillery fire which had been poured upon it. But at the moment the Italian Infantry initiated its advance a hot fire was directed upon them from it.

The objective of the battalion of the 57th in the firing line was the centre of the Oasis of Two Palms. One battalion of the 4th was directed against the southern end of the oasis, whilst the other made for a point beyond it to the south-east to cut off the retreat of the enemy.

The fire of the field and mountain artillery with the column had ceased owing to the proximity of the opposing forces. The fire of the artillery of the Foyat

and Grande behind the advancing force was directed at this time to the zone beyond the oasis, to prevent any reinforcement reaching it.

A strong column appeared on the horizon moving south in the direction of the oasis, and General Ameglio ordered the cavalry to extend in that direction to protect the right flank of the Italian column against any possible attack.

One squadron moved against it, dismounted and attacked in extended order while the other three squadrons, under cover of its fire, manoeuvred round and drove the enemy within range of the guns of the Roma which compelled him to retire.

As the infantry neared the margin of the oasis General Ameglio, after having the new positions reconnoitred and the ranges taken by one of his staff who, subsequently, acted as guide to the batteries, divided the artillery of the column, except the one battery with the General Reserve, between the extreme right and left of the firing line, so as to enfilade the enemy's position as well as the outlets from the oasis.

The changes of position were carried out by the batteries with rapidity and well, and they came into action in the new positions, practically closing all way of escape to the Bedouins.

Masses of Turks and Arabs continued to move rapidly beyond the oasis in a further endeavour to advance in support of the force blocked there by the Italian advance.

The 149-mm. Battery, 3 kilometres off, reached them with its fire and broke them up with shrapnel.

At 300 yards the Bedouins were aiming badly and

their fire was wild. Until then the Italian losses had been very small.

The infantry advance by this time had converged into an enveloping movement in the shape of an arc. The fire of the enemy, weaker on the flanks, was still very steady.

The Bedouins fired only when the Italians were in motion and remained behind cover when the latter halted to reply to their fire.

The ground offered absolutely no cover to the Italians and, at every rush, officers and men were dropped, one company losing three officers out of four.

Changes of command on account of casualties took place almost automatically, without the least confusion.

At 12.30 p.m. the 79th lost its Colonel, and the Officer Commanding the 57th assumed the command of both battalions, but was relieved shortly afterwards under fire by the Colonel of the battalion of the 57th, not in action, who, up to that time, had been a spectator with the staff.

The 4th and 63rd on the right, after having borne down with repeated bayonet assaults the resistance of the enemy on the south margin of the oasis, drove them back into its interior.

In the meantime a vigorous fire action was developing on the west of the oasis, where the enemy had concentrated and were offering the greatest resistance against the centre of the Italian advance, which they had checked at 100 metres from the margin of the oasis. The flanks of the Italian force meantime were converging on the position, and a cross fire became extremely possible.

General Ameglio saw the danger and gave orders to charge. The centre of the line with the Colonel of the 57th at its head arrived almost without any further firing at the position, its rush enabling it to drive back the Bedouins and take possession of the west margin of the oasis.

At this point the battalion of the 57th in general reserve was relieved by the battalion of the 6th and in its turn released the battalion reserves, which were brought up and decided the action.

At 1 p.m. it had been discovered that the main position held by the Bedouins was not on the margin of the oasis as anticipated but further back, and was located within two old stone quarries, worked to the depth of a man's height, natural fortifications bristling with cactus and strongly held by Bedouins who were completely under cover—so much so that the Italians did not see them till within 40 metres of them. The quarries were large enough to hold a couple of thousand.

The 79th on the north, the 4th on the south, the 57th in the centre were sent to the assault.

The outer ditches and, subsequently, the remaining boundary wall of the oasis and the first quarry were carried at the point of the bayonet.

It is worth noting that, the resistance in the first quarry overcome, the 57th were unable to fire into the second, into which the survivors of the first quarry had retired, for fear of hitting their own men, who had initiated a movement at close quarters to turn the enemy's flank; and they commenced to throw stones to make the Bedouins expose themselves. A number came out and fled towards the main body of the Turco-

Arabs. The stone-throwing lasted for some moments till the flank of the second quarry was turned and the Italians were able to get at the enemy who were still within the second quarry, firing without any idea of surrender, dead, wounded, and those in action being mixed up in hopeless confusion.

A large group of Bedouins rose and attempted to retire, but were shot down. A few who succeeded in getting out were likewise shot.

Then followed the last assault. There was so little room that the order was given to sling rifles and use the bayonet alone. The Bedouins had also ceased firing and were using their rifles as clubs.

So hot was the mêlée that the signal whistles and bugles sounding the "Cease Fire" were ineffectual for a few minutes.

The cavalry at this stage were ordered to pursue those who had not awaited the final charge.

During these bayonet assaults the Italians lost 5 officers.

The colours of the 79th were carried in the first line to within 40 metres of the position, and became a conspicuous target for the enemy's fire.

At 2.15 p.m. the Turco-Arabs had been practically broken up and the artillery of the redoubts were firing against groups in retreat.

The Italian troops, according to orders, did not proceed beyond the eastern margin of the oasis.

At 3 o'clock the native cavalry north-east of the oasis drove back a couple of hundred of Arabs hovering in that neighbourhood and the 149-mm. guns completed their rout.

The Italian losses were 37 dead, amongst whom

BENGASI

105

were 5 officers; 140 wounded, amongst whom 12 officers.

305 dead were left by the Bedouins within the larger oasis, and altogether, in the three days following action, the Italians buried 1,006 bodies.

The Italian officers were armed with rifles.

XI

BU KAMESCH

From the Tunisian frontier the shortest caravan road to the Turkish base at Zuara over which the Turks received their supplies passes Bu Kamesch or Forwa, a fort near the coast on the shores of a small bay formed by a peninsula running parallel with the coast and at the apex of which is Cape Macabez.

The 5th Italian Division was sent there with the twofold object of closing the caravan road to Turkish convoys and finding a station for destroyers engaged in preventing supplies reaching the enemy by sea.

A demonstration in force and the threatened landing of two battalions of Grenadiers at Zuara, some 40 kilometres south-east nearer Tripoli, successfully engaged the attention of the whole of the Turkish forces during the landing at the real objective.

To avoid espionage the division embarked in Italy, leaving under escort on the night of April 6-7, 1912, assembling at sea 15 miles north of Zuara at 4 p.m. on the 9th. There two destroyers and a torpedo-boat originating from Tripoli who, during the previous night, had reconnoitred the coast off Macabez, of which no chart was available, joined them.

At 8 p.m. the convoy steamed at 5 knots towards the coast without lights and arrived at 10.30 p.m.

within six miles of the Cape. This was as close to land as was deemed prudent on account of the shoals.

Landing operations were initiated at once.

A battalion of sailors with a battery of machine-guns and a company of sappers was embarked in pinnaces, and at 5.15 a.m. without lights proceeded to the peninsula under escort of a cruiser, a destroyer and two torpedo-boats, ordered to get as close to land as possible to cover the landing.

Without resistance the force disembarked at daylight in the Bay near the Cape forming the apex of the peninsula and entrenched.

A solitary Arab was seen, who immediately bolted south towards Sidi Said.

At 8 a.m. on the 7th the first troops from the transports reached the peninsula, the sappers having in the meantime erected some light floating jetties they had brought over in pieces. At 11 a.m. the landing of troops was completed, the peninsula occupied and the landing of stores and material begun.

The first trenches dug by the sailors were abandoned for others thrown forward 6 kilometres from the point of the original landing.

Major-General Lequio assumed command, relieved later by the Divisional Commander, Lieut.-General Garioni.

The base established, the occupation of Fort Bu Kamesch or Forwa on the mainland remained. The chief difficulty, presuming the fort to be held by a hostile force, was the crossing of the small bay, which formed the most direct way to the objective, but was absolutely without cover.

A reconnaissance in a small boat by the commander

of the destroyer *Canopo* the previous night had shown the fort to be occupied.

On the night of the 10-11 a detachment of sailors, a company of Askari under Italian officers, one of sappers and one of Customs Guards (in Italy a military unit) embarked in boats to attack the fort.

The boats had to pick their way through rocks and shallows which considerably retarded them, so that it was some hours before the troops set foot on shore 500 metres above the fort—the last 200 having to be waded.

On all sides except the north the fort was dominated by a dune 800 metres off, beyond which the ground was practically flat and free of cover. Patrols were sent down while the sailors, Askari and sappers in extended order advanced towards the fort with the Guards in reserve. At 300 metres they halted and a squad of Askari at the double rushed the fort, which was found abandoned, and occupied it.

Immediately after the landing of the Italians a concentration of Turkish forces began at Sidi Said. This locality is on slightly elevated ground below the base of the peninsula in a south-easterly direction.

At daylight on the 12th some Arab groups opened fire on the Italians, increasing the difficulties of the details taking supplies across the bay to the fort. They were shelled by the mountain batteries.

At 11 a.m. two dirigibles from Tripoli reconnoitred the surrounding country and reported the enemy not in force in the neighbourhood.

At 11 a.m. on April 13 General Garioni took advantage of the atmospheric conditions caused by a very strong

Ghibli or desert whirlwind, which made it difficult to distinguish objects at a very short distance, to send a battalion of Askari (less one company in the fort) to dislodge a body of some 400 Arabs who had appeared west of the fort. The battalion, after a forced march along the contour of the bay in the face of great difficulties, both as regards direction and heavy-going, reached and surprised the Arabs at 3 p.m., dislodging them from their position, from which they withdrew leaving a good many casualties behind. The Askari, who had seven wounded, had orders not to pursue, and, having accomplished their task, returned to camp, reaching it at 6 p.m.

On April 14 the garrison of the fort was reinforced by the 60th as well as by the balance of the Askari battalion, and steps were taken to extend the zone occupied by the Italians on the mainland by the construction of trenches bringing within it the dune before referred to. This work was practically completed by the 22nd, and a strong force under Major-General Lequio occupied the trenches.

On the 21st a boat manned by armed Arabs reconnoitred towards the mouth of the bay and on the 22nd detached groups of horsemen reconnoitred south and south-east of the fort.

The occupation of Bu Kamesch had driven the Turks to seek new lines of communication. Information reached the Officer Commanding Italian Division that some two hours' march inland from the fort were some wells of which use was about to be made by caravans carrying contraband supplies from Tunis to Sidi Said.

At daylight on April 23 the Askari battalion under Major Matteoli was detailed to locate the position and capacity of the wells. While the battalion was crossing a watercourse south-west of the fort its scouts signalled strong bodies of the enemy advancing from the south-south-east. A sharp engagement developed, Turkish reinforcements marching to the firing and attempting to outflank the Askari. The 60th battalion was sent from the fort to support the Askari, with orders to both the battalions to withdraw from the engagement, if possible, drawing the Turks after them.

Slowly the two battalions retired in echelon by alternate units with very little loss, and followed in by the Turkish force, against whom a field battery in the fort came into action.

An aeroplane went up in reconnaissance, and though a light fog somewhat impeded its view it reported the Turks in force towards Sidi Said, where their reserves were apparently massed. Two additional batteries from the field works at Bu Kamesch came into action against them. At the same time a mountain battery on the peninsula opened fire across the bay against detached groups of the enemy who had appeared on that side.

At this stage a section of Turkish 75-mm. mountain artillery replied to the fire of the Italian batteries from a position near the margin of the watercourse, firing first with time fuses, then percussion shells. The direction and range were correct, but the shells sunk in the sand and did little damage.

The attacking force, by now somewhat crowded, checked by the field battery in the fort, as well as by the fire of the 60th and enfiladed by the other Italian

batteries, failed at the critical stage of the attack and was compelled to retire. They did so slowly and steadily under the fire of the Italian guns.

Foreseeing this, the O.C. division from the observation tower on the Peninsula telephoned to General Lequio to get a battalion of Bersaglieri out of the Bu Kamesch trenches preparatory to counter-attack at the opportune moment.

Before this could eventuate a strong force of Turco-Arabs who had made a rapid detour under cover suddenly appeared west of Bu Kamesch, or exactly opposite where the first attack had been initiated and out of range of the artillery of the peninsula. With no less rapidity the Askari battalion, which after its retirement had been kept in reserve, was sent against them, and assisted by the fire of a field battery and a mountain battery, drove back the enemy in disorder.

The Bersaglieri replaced in the trenches by a battalion of Grenadiers at this stage charged the Turco-Arabs in the direction of Sidi Said and completed their rout.

At noon the Turks had completely disappeared towards Zuara.

The Italian losses were 7 dead and 57 wounded.

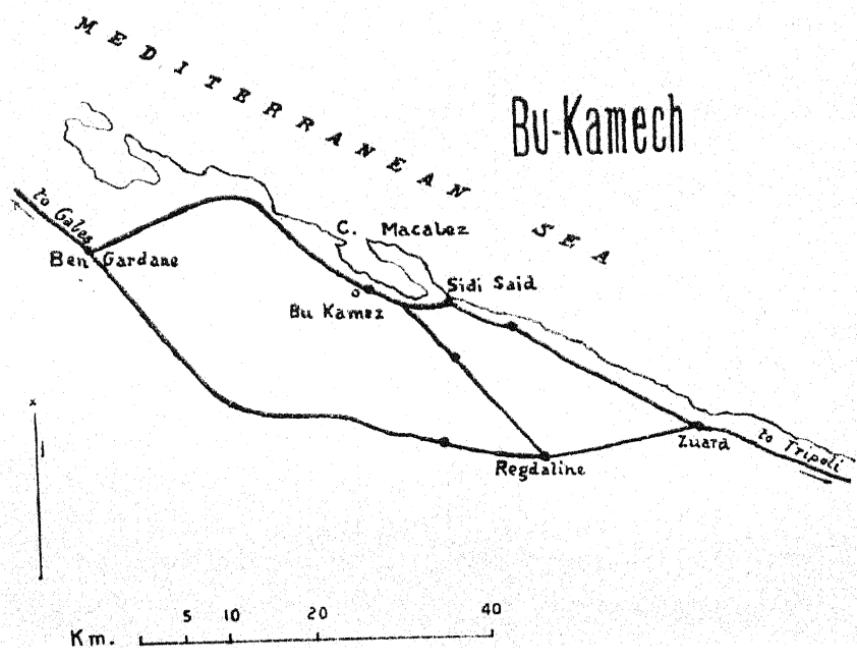
On May 2-3 a battalion of the 60th, the Askari battalion with quickfirers and a detachment of sappers effected a reconnaissance, starting at 3 a.m. towards the caravan road south of Bu Kamesch, to which it was suspected some of the contraband traffic had been directed under cover of a Turco-Arab force, including horsemen reported in position between the road and the fort.

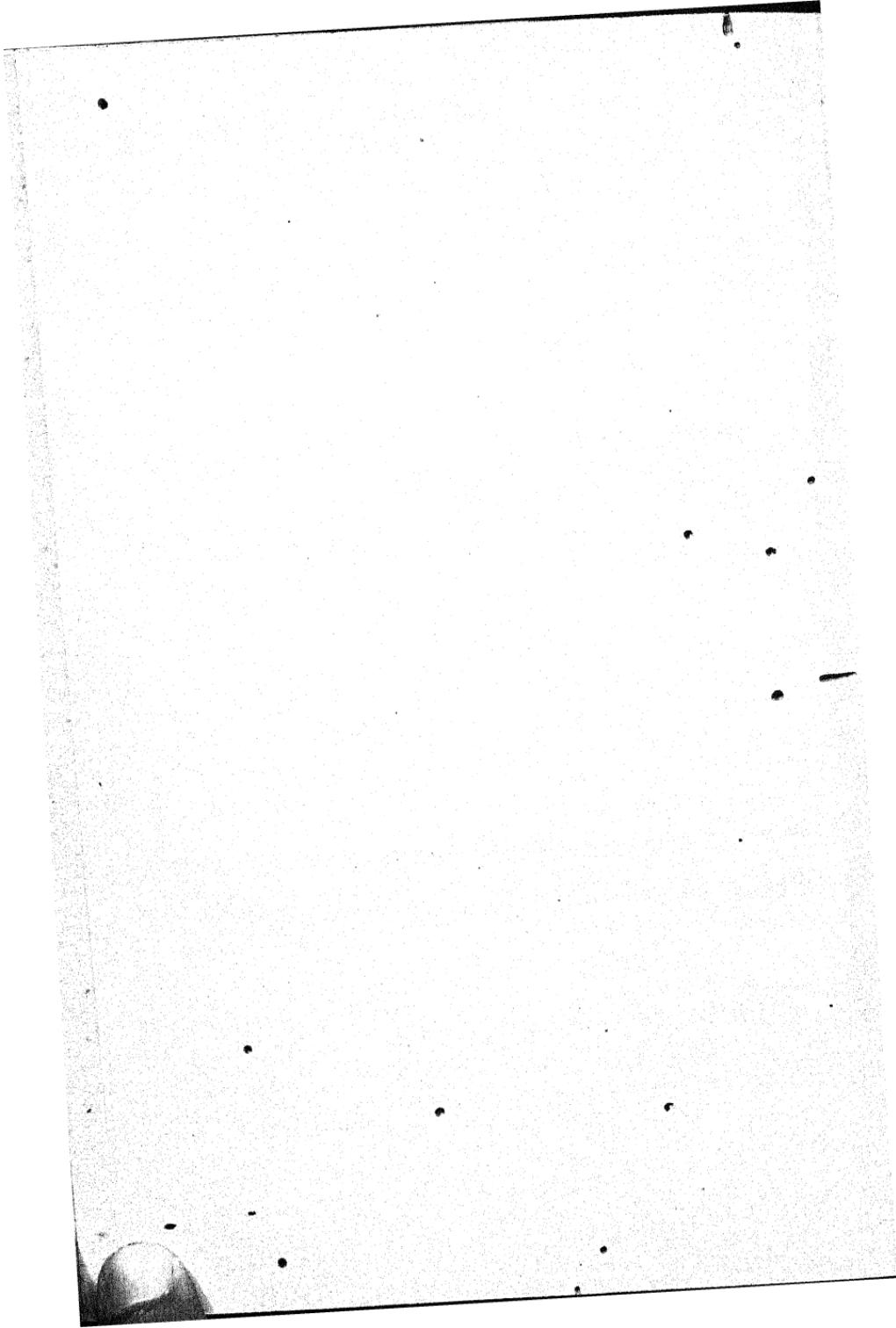
The Italian troops after a march of some 5 kilo-

metres found the enemy entrenched some 2,000 strong with quickfirers. The Askari, who had outpaced the 60th, attacked with the 60th in reserve and after a brief fire action charged the trenches, driving the Turks out at the point of the bayonet.

The Italians did not pursue but, after pushing as far as and reconnoitring the road for a brief distance, retired on the fort taking with them several hundred rifles picked up on the field and followed by a desultory fire from isolated groups of the enemy.

The Askari lost 5 dead and 40 wounded.





XII

ZANZUR

Zanzur Oasis is roughly 12 kilometres south-west from Gargaresch and a little over 1 from the coast, where a range of small hills runs parallel to and dominates it. The easternmost of these hills is known as Sidi Ebn el Gelil, and formed the objective of the Italian operations on June 8.

A caravan road joins Tripoli with Gargaresch and Zanzur.

The first division (Camerana) was directed upon Sidi Ebn, leaving Gargaresch at 3.30 a.m., June 7-8, in two columns. On the right the Brigade Giardino, formed by the 6th and 40th Infantry Regiments, one company of Customs Guards and two Mountain Batteries, with its left on the caravan road. On the left the Brigade Rinaldi, formed by the 82nd and 84th Infantry Regiments and three batteries of shielded Field Artillery.

South of No. 3 redoubt at Gargaresch, where General Caneva, the Commander-in-Chief, remained throughout the day, a Cavalry Brigade (two regiments) two battalions of the 37th Infantry Regiment, one battalion of Askari (three companies), and one battery Mountain Artillery, fortified a first reserve, under General Carpeneto.

At Bu Meliana two infantry regiments formed the second reserve, under General Montuori.

The first division came into contact with small patrols of the enemy almost at the inception of its march. At 5 a.m. the scouts of the advance guard of the Brigade Giardino came upon the enemy in trenches constructed with considerable strategic skill across the caravan road and to the right of it. Level with the ground some 5 ft. 6 in. in depth these trenches communicated by cross passages with excavations in rear, which permitted supports assembled there to reinforce the firing-line at any point without being seen. The defenders fired standing, exposing the upper portion of their heads and disappearing immediately after each round.

General Giardino sent the battalion of the 40th who had formed the advance guard to make a detour to the right along the seashore towards the objective, with orders to attack and occupy it.

For an hour and a half the 6th and the remainder of the 40th vainly endeavoured to break through the Turkish defence. Their fire against the entrenched enemy had little or no effect. The Italians were getting nervy when General Giardino gave the order to advance.

The greatest losses of the day occurred at this stage. The Italians had to cross some 1,000 metres of ground devoid of cover, and also within range of a force on the eastern limit of the oasis. The whole line advanced by short rushes, the two mountain batteries following the infantry and considerably helping it. A final halt was made at fifty paces from the first trench, and the whole line threw itself down to enable the artillery to fire over their heads. Rising, the line charged and,

jumping into the trenches, carried them after a brief struggle.

As the brigade were re-forming, fire was opened upon them from a trench on the right, to which some of the defenders of the first trench or their supports had moved. A company of the 40th was sent to take it while the two mountain batteries converged their fire upon it, driving out some 400 of the enemy, a portion of whom fell under a bayonet charge. A naturally strong position farther back was taken by the 6th Regiment and the 3rd Battalion of the 40th, while the 2nd Battalion of that regiment drove the Turks from two trenches dominating the road and forming with the other a triangle with a very wide base.

The Brigade Rinaldi, on the left, had meantime delivered a successful bayonet attack in which participated a portion of the 6th Regiment which had become detached from its brigade, against the enemy in position on the left of the road.

The Turks fell back on a green dune south-east of the Zanzur oasis, where they were joined by details driven back by the Battalion of the 40th, which had, meantime, reached its objective, at Sidi Ebn, where the Italian flag was hoisted shortly after 7 a.m.

The artillery rained shrapnel on the green dune, which the 82nd and 84th carried at the point of the bayonet.

Other Arabs from Sidi Ebn disputed the advance of a portion of the Brigade Giardino who, on the right, had to fight their way, dune by dune. At the initiation of the engagement reinforcements were called for by the Turks from all surrounding camps, and at the

time the Brigade Rinaldi became engaged, they were beginning to arrive from the south, and threatening, in constantly augmented numbers, the left flank of the first division. From the reserve at the redoubt, the cavalry and the battalion of Askari were detached to check the enemy.

At 7 a.m. two companies of Askari, who had moved to the front almost as rapidly as the cavalry, were in position at 500 metres interval, with the 3rd company in reserve. The cavalry were on the left of the Askari, half one regiment dismounted, in touch with and prolonging the infantry line, which was somewhat convex in shape.

At 8 a.m. the enemy, amongst whom a number of horsemen and Turkish Regulars, steadily increasing in numbers, concentrated a hot fire upon the Italians, who found the position untenable, and asked for reinforcements, after absorbing the Askari company in reserve, who relieved the cavalry. The latter moved to the left towards the Brigade Montuori.

As the reserve company of the Askari were moving to the front the Turks increased the volume of their fire in support of an attempt to turn the left of the Italian line—defeated, however, by the artillery on No. 3 redoubt by the fire of the Askari, joined shortly afterwards by a battalion of the 84th detached from the 1st Division; who took up a position in rear of the first line, and by one of its shielded batteries trotted over the intervening sand and arrived in time to co-operate in driving back the turning movement.

The Askari, who for two hours had borne the brunt of the engagement, were ordered to fall back upon Gargaresch. The three companies retired in echelon

on the left towards the 84th. The Turco-Arabs, encouraged by the apparent retreat, increased their fire and, advancing, occupied the position evacuated by the Askari.

In vastly superior numbers the Turks then took the offensive, the Italian force retiring slowly before them. For an hour, the Turks jumped from dune to dune, dropping men, but still advancing and endeavouring to turn the flank of the retiring force, to whose assistance the Battalion of the 37th and the Mountain Battery of the 1st Reserve were moving.

The retirement was continued slowly and in good order, until half a company of Askari deliberately halted to pick up two of its dead. The other half-company went back to them. The enemy hesitated, and the whole of the retiring force then delivered a counter-attack with the bayonet, driving back the enemy, who were taken in flank by the Brigade Montuori, who had marched from Bu Meliana, 10 kilometres over shifting sand in two and a half hours. The artillery soon converted the retreat of the Turks into a rout.

In this phase of the action the dirigible P 3 dropped some bombs on the retiring Turks.

The Turks were by this in retreat everywhere, except on the eastern margin of the Zanzur Oasis, where a strong force, chiefly regulars, was still holding its own. The Brigade Rinaldi took the offensive, and with its artillery drove them back and pursued them for some three miles.

Towards 1 p.m. new bodies of Arabs appeared from the south-east, moving towards Zanzur, across the front of the Brigade Montuori. The fire of the Italians

did not check them till the 37th attacked and drove them back upon this Brigade, whom they ineffectually attempted to take in flank, but who put them to flight.

At 4 p.m. reinforcements from the direction of Bir Tobras on their way to Zanzur were taken in flank by the Brigade Montuori, and retired in haste.

At 5 p.m. the Reserves returned to quarters.

The shielded artillery, at the conclusion of the engagement, joined the force of the 1st Division in occupation of Sidi Ebn, the defences of which had been strengthened.

Mention must be made here of a service of motor-lorries, over fifty in number, well organised and carried on, which, after taking defence material, rations and equipment, to Sidi Ebn immediately on its occupation, removed the wounded from the field ambulances to the railway at Gargaresch, completing its work before 3 p.m.

The result of the engagement deprived the Turks of a further tract of coast-line, and brought the Italians closer to Zuara and the caravan roads forming the Turkish lines of communication with their base of supplies. It also brought the Italians closer to Suadi Ben Allen, south of Tripoli and the last Turkish post between the sea and the stronghold of the Garian, in which the Turks found concentration possible on account of the lack of water farther inland.

The Italian force numbered some 13,000 men with 40 guns.

Italian losses, 1 officer and 29 men killed, 8 officers and 192 men wounded.

The Italians took 800 prisoners, including wounded.